

FORTUNATA



MARJORIE PATTERSON

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A NOVEL

BY
MARJORIE PATTERSON



P 334
1911

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXI

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PUBLISHED FEBRUARY, 1911

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CHAPTER I

IN the intervals of backbitings and scandals the Princess Colibri had yet found time to discover that her niece Fortunata was growing up to be an ignorant young barbarian. Though indolent in nothing else, the drudgery of mental work revolted her. Like most foreign children, she spoke several languages—English, French, and German, fluently; also a little Spanish. She had need of solitude; she was lonely only when in a crowd. Her sister Francesca, a commonplace, unattractive child, she avoided. Francesca's flaxen braids, her prominent blue eyes, her nails cut down to the quick, her systematic thumpings of the piano, her conscientious self-instruction, her unimaginative outlook—all this was contemptible to Fortunata.

In the apartments haunted by evil-eyed rats, where mysterious draughts shook the tapestries and the plumed crests of the armor, where the trees of the garden kept tap-rapping on the windows in warning, Fortunata perched on the sill and gave herself up to thought. With her throat stretched out, her face turned up, her eyes fixed on the rafters, she sug-

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gested a little dog baying at the moon. In thought, she rescued her enemies from flaming houses. Her rivals she saved from beneath the hoofs of trampling horses. All thanks she declined with a simple eloquence, the mere thought of which brought to her eyes tears of admiration.

Though pale, she was a healthy child, and was never ill. She wrote her will; so beautifully was it worded that she wept and revelled in emotion. She never enjoyed herself more. She courted the spirits of darkness; she longed to raise the dead; she envied Hamlet, who had seen his father's ghost. Next to evoking the devil, she yearned to behold her father, and never went to bed without this impressive invocation: "Ugo Constantino d'Estradde Rivallo, spirit of my father, appear! Haunt me this night and reveal the secrets of the tomb!" But never did any sheeted form arise to stalk about her bed.

Miss Billford, the governess, a gentle, old English lady belonging to the now extinct type that wore a black bombazine dress and had the "Flight Out of Egypt" depicted on a brooch, grew greatly troubled—her eldest pupil had no religion. When Fortunata was eleven and Eugenio, her brother, nine, they determined to shake off the shackles of the Church and to become atheists. Antonia, their elder half-sister, was wont to hold forth on her fervent religious feelings, but the two children would shrug their shoulders, roll up their eyes, puff out their cheeks, and mutely express derision. Although a staunch Episcopalian and holding all "popery" as fire and brimstone, nevertheless, Miss Billford, good soul, thought it her duty to go the round of the Catholic churches

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of Rome, striving to light in her charge some spark of faith—with what success can be imagined.

Fortunata took a craze for reading. She devoured French, Italian, and English novels; tragedies, comedies, and poems. She lived these books. She was all the heroines and in love with all the heroes. In the unoccupied bedroom she chose to make her library there was a painting that aroused her imagination. In a wild and sombre garden a young man kissed a stone Sphinx who held him encircled in her savage forepaws. The boy's head was thrown back, and in the shadow of the leaves his eyes gleamed with an ardent and caressing light. This painting penetrated Fortunata with sadness. She felt the loss of something wonderful, dimly remembered, the passion of a former life, perhaps, the like of which she would never find again.

Suddenly, one day, she had a mortifying thought. Here she was thirteen and had never loved! Oh, shameful! Many of Scott's heroines were married by the time they were sixteen. Whom could she love? She considered, and remembered a blond English boy, a friend of Eugenio's, whose cleanly smell of soap and well-cut Eton clothes had charmed her.

On the Princess's reception day he came to call on Fortunata. The children passed the evening on the stairs, and as the grandees stalked through the hall beneath, they entertained themselves by spitting on the heads of the nobility. *Qui n'a pas sa terre promise, son jour d'extase et sa fin dans l'exil* was Fortunata's chant for the next month. Her *jour d'extase* was that remembered Thursday. Her *fin*

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dans l'exil followed soon. The Colibri, as the Princess was called, after the Italian fashion, announced that she had decided to send her niece to a French boarding-school.

"What!" cried Fortunata, in horror. "A Rivallo at a vulgar French pension—impossible!" And she strode from the room, dramatic and enraged. The Princess was delighted with such a snobbish spirit. It did not cause her, however, to alter her determination.

Fortunata's father, Conte Ugo Rivallo, had been killed out hunting while riding across the Campagna, breaking in his horse. He was a typical hero of romance. Of an illustrious Piedmontese family, he was sordidly poor, a gambler, and most unlucky. Of merely moderate intelligence, nevertheless he possessed one talent—the art of living at the expense of his friends, sharing their horses, their wines, their wives. He was of that type beloved by the female novelist—charmingly unscrupulous, blond, elegant, with the heroic manner—a mingling of the martial and the languid.

With that first flux of Americans who came to the Continent with the avowed object of exchanging their shekels and daughters for a title, had been a respectable New-Yorker, Mr. J. B. Brandelsbury, and with his daughter he had taken up residence at the Hotel Quirinale, in Rome. Annie was fresh from boarding-school—though "fresh" is an inadequate adjective as applied to a being so frail, so anæmic, yet possessed of a peevish prettiness, only precious from its quality of insecurity.

Rivallo, with the appreciation of opportunity

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peculiar to men who live by their wits, had seen in Annie Brandelsbury an all-satisfying bride, able to endow him with sums sufficient to indulge his magical spending powers—for bank-notes were known to vanish in his hands with Hermann-like rapidity. He followed her about on his foreign, long-toed shoes, his glances eloquent of a languorous ardor; he waltzed with her to the clanking of his sabre, offered her flowers symbolical of love—the rose, the red geranium—and brushed across her wrist his blond mustache. “I love him! I adore him! I cannot live without him!” Annie told her father, with the neat enunciation of a mechanical toy. Though staggered by the enormity of the dot, Mr. Brandelsbury resigned, with a less intuitive spirit than that which had accumulated his wealth, his daughter and the better part of his fortune and took ship for New York.

The Conte brought his wife to that umbrageous palace where he had lived with his sister since her marriage to the Principe Colibri. Too proud to sell his hereditary property near Milan, Rivallo, years before, had locked his gates, never to return. Desolation overspread his vineyards and his house fell—a pitiable ruin.

The Palazzo Colibri is one of the marvels of Rome. The gateway faces the Corso Vittorio Emanuele; the court is cool and silent. In the centre thereof is set a circle of melancholy stone lions, through whose jaws streams of water spout into a shallow basin. The palace stands back in shadow. Though of an ornate and wonderful architecture, it is fallen into decay. In the alcoves of the reception-hall

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pose statues of "Chastity," "Prudence," "Silence," "Modesty," who have all lost a finger, a lip, or a nose. Old Nello, the head servant, was wont to potter every morning about these venerable women, pretending to spruce them up with a feather-duster. The staircase is still a marvel of intricate stonework, though disfigured by a green-and-red matting laid to protect the middle of the stairs. In the rear, in a wilderness of garden, grow laurel and myrtle, the solemn cypress and pungent box. From the façade, the ever-patient saints, the Madonna, and constant cherubim have not given over watching, while the warriors sleep with their spears; monks, too, stand in their niches, wasted by time, wrapt in the ineffable sadness of decay. The Palazzo hears only the murmurings of its fountain, the challenging of bells whose towers cut the sky and stands, like a senator of ancient Rome who, having far outlived his time, endures at last the blow which must prove fatal, and hides his face in his toga, resigned to the passing of his grandeur and the final dissolution.

Annie, born to the genial rattle of Fifth Avenue, to the contemplation of plush and gaudy mirrors, was uncharmed by the Palazzo's sinister beauty. She trembled as the doors, swinging apart, revealed her future home, the desolate expanse of hall, the stairs mounting to portentous obscurity, the banners dusty, forgotten, brooding in the shadow, with wings furled like birds of prey grown old on the battle-field. But most her heart quailed at the thought that this roof sheltered her only by permission of her sister-in-law, before whom Annie lost color and voice—a feeble chirp at best.

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The Princess Colibri was twenty years her brother's senior; erratic in the extreme, her irregularities of mind displayed themselves in her dress. Never was seen such a conglomeration of styles; such Elizabethan ruffs, extravagant turbans, cockatoo feathers, bugles, lugubrious hearse-plumes—opposed to her Excellency's grotesque face with its spreading features of a comedy mask. A divided opinion reigned as to the Princess. By some she was thought to possess a brilliant mind, though impaired by the eccentricities of genius; by others (and to these she was grateful, as upholding the reputation for which she labored) she was regarded in the light of a malignant, cantankerous harridan. No word they found too bitter—harpy, viper, virago—yet her Excellency, in truth, was like the rest of women, with possibly a tinge more of vanity, of ambition, of the inflated ego, being obsessed with a longing to figure as a personality. Too intelligent to lay claim to beauty or charm, indifferent to love, she concentrated her ability on the art of making others ridiculous. She pictured herself as a female Swift, whose sarcasm, more venomous than a serpent's tooth, confounded her opponents and brought to shame her imagined oppressors. For years she had said, "Mine is a very vicious tongue; I am a dangerous woman to have as an enemy." Now, with patience, all Rome repeated, "The Colibri has a very vicious tongue; she is a dangerous woman to have as an enemy." It was not alone those who incurred her displeasure, and they were many, but friends—if such she may have been said to possess—above all, toadies, poor relatives, and dependents, who bore the

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brunt of her Excellency's caustic humor. The mania for wit had taken such a hold of the Princess that she could no longer say good-morning or hand a teacup without making a pun or a bon mot.

Her Excellency, when a young girl, had married Prince Colibri, a man very much her senior, of a dreary disposition, but of prominence in diplomatic circles. In three, as she considered unwasted, years she talked, scolded, nagged, shocked, and terrified the old gentleman into his grave. Left alone, she became even more of a virago, made enemies left and right, composed satirical pamphlets and bitter poems, which she shipped off to people who happened to displease her.

Rome is fatalistic. In spite of the Princess's eccentricities, she still had a large following to tremble at her frown. Her behavior imperilled her standing at court, and, under the plea of illness, she resigned her position as lady-in-waiting to the Queen—just in time, so said scandal, to keep herself from being dismissed. In spite, or perhaps because of her tongue, the Princess was kowtowed to in Rome. Every Thursday she held a reception. On that day the palace swarmed with the aristocracy of both factions. The guests thronged in and out of the great hall; the servants, in their faded liveries, served meagre refreshments, or stalked lugubriously about by the light of some few twinkling candles, which in no way dispelled the obscurity of the draughty stretch of rooms.

Not only because of the persecutions of her sister-in-law, who could not forbear to tease the plaintive Annie, was the Contessa in need of sympathy. She

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found herself in the trying relationship of step-mother to a ten-year-old girl. Rivallo, when only twenty, had married a young Italian, who, dying, left him a daughter. True type of the child born of a love-match as romantic as ill-fated, Antonia Rivallo had inherited a Southern nature—ardent, volcanic, knowing no bounds in affection or hatred. Her friends were without blemish; those whom she chose to call her enemies, monsters. Growing up in solitude, cramming her mind with French and Italian novels, untaught in self-control, Antonia's emotions were so violent as almost to unbalance her mind, her moods alternating from the wildest enthusiasm to the most profound melancholy. At the news that her father, whom she devotedly loved, had got him a wife—a stepmother's influence, Antonia's literature had taught her, was devastating to the home—she was overswept with despair, locked herself in her room, and for two days refused to eat or speak. Burning with resentment, she finally emerged and took her place at table. Apprehensive Annie, struggling with the vermicelli, omnipresent in the Roman menu, felt the blazing eyes of her newly acquired stepdaughter and gave up the chase of the limp viand. She asked for nothing more than to live without contention. To Antonia she offered a willing, if tepid, affection, but the sombre girl refused all overtures with the manner of a tragedy queen. The timid stepmother was unnerved, and started at the shadow cast in passing by this long, lugubrious child.

CHAPTER II

FOUR years had passed between the death of her father and the moment of Fortunata's departure for boarding-school—four years potent in the framing of her nature, a nature independent, secretive, and, above all, egotistical, for self and for self only. She had been her father's favorite, and he had dragged her with him everywhere—to Paris, Venice, Naples, London—possessed by the idea that his little daughter brought him luck. His less unusual children, Eugenio and Francesca, were left to their mother's easy tears. Fortunata was a capable soul, never had she been a baby or a child, but an individual from the moment of her birth. She scorned weakness, and was utterly bored by her plaintive and tear-drowning mother. Her father's pleasures caused him to absent himself for days from his daughter, leaving her to the inhospitable corridors of a hotel and the pastimes of her own invention. For her solitary meals into the restaurant she walked undaunted; ordered; re-ordered; sent scornfully away; showed off; made the waiters laugh. Yet by reason of her father's uncertainty in paying his bills, she was not as popular as she might otherwise have been.

To this world no comet had announced her arrival, yet she was born with the conviction that she was

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an unusual and talented person. She never showed her conceit, but her ambitions gave her great secret pleasure. In solitude she mapped out for herself a glorious career. First, she was to have been a dancer, and she might have succeeded, for she was agile, graceful, and well-made; next, she burned to be an actress, a second Rachel. Then fame as an author appeared possible, and she wrote a mediæval romance in six copy-books. Later, in fancy, she became a dramatist. Her works were to be powerful but immoral—they would contain the gloom of an Ibsen and the art of a Maupassant. Her tragedy, as yet in embryo, "Ghosts That Return Not," was played in imagination at the Théâtre Français. She attended in the President's box, in her best white dress. At the end, to the cries of "Author! Author!" she appeared upon the stage and bowed low between Sarah Bernhardt and Mounet-Sully.

A crash in Rivallo's precarious finances about this time caused him, with his daughter and what baggage escaped his creditors, to beat a retreat to the Palazzo Colibri, to urge the protection of his pugnacious sister. With not enough money left to make a genial clinking, he was still as debonair as ever. He waxed his mustache and overtrod his shoes, and threw them away as gayly as before, and on his borrowed hunters aired his martial spurs. Unfortunately, one of these borrowed hunters it was which caused his death, and thereby prevented him from wasting the few remaining dollars of his wife's dowry. Fortunata was moved but little by her father's death; in fact, she experienced a certain pleasurable excitement. She felt herself of added

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importance. Antonia, Eugenio, and Francesca annoyed her. They took away from her distinction. She wanted to be the only fatherless child.

But all that was long ago, and she was now leaving for boarding-school. As, years before, she had decreed the departure of Eugenio for England to prepare for Oxford and the advent of Miss Billford, the Princess Colibri had decided upon a French school for her niece.

"Annie, if you remember," she had said to her sister-in-law, "a sufficient sum was settled by your father on the children for their schooling. When does it begin? Come, decide! Santa Madonna! Are you crying, or is it that your eyes perpetually leak?"

The Princess had a stilted, high-flown manner of speech, pompous, wearisome in the extreme, and interlarded with smart quotations, coarse speeches, and internal references to mythology.

At the sound of her Excellency's voice, Annie raised her hands and waved them with the helplessness of a drowning person. A rapidly increasing deafness—an hereditary disease—combined with hypochondria, and her imagined ailments, had caused her to release all hold on life.

"Oh, it is so easy for some people to decide!" she cried, helplessly; "but I am not used to it! I can't do it! My kind father and dear husband have always decided for me." When the Contessa referred to anybody as "kind" or "dear," they were certain to be either dead or overwhelmed with misfortune. "I know the dear children need to be taught—Francesca, is it time for my seven drops? Oh, if their

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dear father were only here to advise me!" The Contessa had lately discovered in Rivallo countless virtues, until now unsuspected.

"Very well," announced the Princess, "Fortunata shall go to a pension which I have discovered near Paris." And thither Fortunata went.

The distinguished Spanish Countess del Santa Cruz, having lost in Spain her husband, her fortune, and the best part of her reputation, had, with her four talented daughters and one talented son, taken refuge in France, and on the outskirts of Paris bought a dilapidated country house, which she had christened The Terrestrial Paradise and opened as a boarding-school for young ladies. It must be admitted that, in enumerating the famous professors from Paris whose services she had engaged, the Countess drew upon her vivid Southern imagination, for these boasted instructors, alas! proved to be her own offspring—Margherita, Ferdinanda, Pepita, Carolla, and Alfonso. True it is, however, a more versatile group of geniuses never shone. Had a fond mamma written, "I am anxious that my daughter should learn ventriloquism," the trusting mother would have received this reply: "The famed ventriloquist Professor Spinnetti visits us every Wednesday. Your dear daughter," etc. Spinnetti, no doubt, would not have appeared, but his place would have been adequately taken by Carolla or Alfonso, or any one of the glittering constellation.

But if the Countess del Santa Cruz chose to cheat, it was in an elegant manner—she seldom lost her temper or raised her voice.

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"Behold the property of Madame la Comtesse!" quoth Baptiste, driver of the rickety omnibus bearing Fortunata and Miss Billford, as they rolled into the unkempt grounds of The Terrestrial Paradise. At that moment a group of youthful Amazons, in jerseys, darted across the road, pursuing one another at tag.

"The young ladies are at play," observed Baptiste, and he pointed to the *presbytère*, where a number of the pupils slept, the house proper being overcrowded. At a turning of the road up loomed the house itself, square and boxlike. They gained the steps; out rushed the Countess, kissed Fortunata on both cheeks, declaring that she was charming, adorable. One was surprised to hear her thin, piping voice issue through so heavy and grizzled a mustache. Now was the turn of the offspring to salute Fortunata fondly on both cheeks, which they accordingly did—all, of course, excepting Alfonso. The four young ladies were in their *peignoirs*, and had their hair streaming down their backs. The strenuous life they led did not allow them time to dress. When visitors came, they excused their attire, explaining that they had just washed their hair.

Fortunata spent a wretched evening. She partook, with the school, of a miserable supper, served by an old peasant woman in shuffling wooden shoes. The bare dining-room was dimly lit by a few oil lamps that merely served to define the scholars' chewing profiles. "Good-bye, my childhood!" Fortunata said inwardly—"and you, my day-dreams, good-bye!"

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“Our school days are our happiest”—what a false platitude! Childhood has been oversung. With many natures it is a time of loneliness, misunderstanding, and nameless disappointment. Children lack the power of expression. Often a sense of righteous indignation, that flames in the heart and scalds the eyelids, finds vent only in ill-tempered screams. Besides, what an ugly age! Youth that captivates at seventeen is not charming at twelve. To-night the *débutante*’s mouth is comparable to a rose. Four years ago it watered greedily at the name of Suchard or Cailler. To-night she talks prettily of the books mamma won’t let her read—“Wasn’t Guy de Maupassant a Crusader?” The little hypocrite, has she forgot the study hours spent in reading yellow-covered novels disguised as French grammar?

What dreary days those were for Fortunata, and how she loathed her studies! She cared nothing for Clovis nor Charlemagne, and an expurgated edition of Gargantua, read aloud while she darned her stockings, bored her to death. Her one enjoyment was to assume the rôle of a female Hamlet, of a dry and caustic humor. She had a large following; she was considered a rare and brilliant spirit. On her thumb she wore a huge signet ring of her father’s. She let it clang against her desk, declaring, “It was given to me by a man who loved me to distraction.” She entertained her coterie with hair-stirring ghost stories. The few rules there were she systematically broke. All through meals she made hideous faces at Alfonso. He had been greatly smitten with her at first, but under her continued coldness soon trans-

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ferred his affections. She led his mamma, the poor Countess, an awful life. Once, just before the holidays, Fortunata was discovered trying to smuggle a hat-box into the school.

"Mademoiselle, what is that?"

"My summer hat, Countess."

"Let me see it, ma chérie."

Fortunata needs must open the box. It was stuffed to the lid with pralines, and square on the top lay *Manon Lescaut*. The Countess said but three words: "*Je suis brisée!*"—a vague expression, "I am broken, crushed, smithered to bits."

For two years Fortunata systematically reduced the Countess to fragments. At first her deviltries aroused a mild amusement, but the last summer of her sojourn she overreached herself. It came about this way.

The Santa Cruz family had twelve birthdays a year; for not only did they celebrate the days on which they were born, but also the days of the saints after whom they were named, and so systematically had this remarkable family been born and named that one of their birthdays fell on every month of the year. Fortunata was overheard commenting on this coincidence and declaring that for the Countess the phenomenon was not unfortunate, in that the scholars' offerings—no shops being near—took the form of lucre; large sums, too, for who would dare to offer a few beggarly sous to the friends of the Queen Isabella? This one sting of ridicule did Fortunata more harm than all her months of constant rebellion. From that day she fell in favor.

During the last week she had taken to eating

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walnuts during the chapel service, and had been severely criticised for so unseemly a habit. One never-to-be-forgotten evening some friend prompted her to take a pocketful of nuts to the Countess's deportment class—a very solemn ritual when young ladies, sixty English hoydens who spent their mornings in languid pursuit of learning and their afternoons beating one another's shin black and blue at hockey, were ranged about the room in white kid gloves. At the moment when the Countess was instructing Miss Ruby Parks, daughter of a Liverpool coal merchant, in the art of chatting with royalty, one of the offending walnuts went crash under Fortunata's heel. Though intent on her hobnobbing with the crowned heads of Europe, nevertheless the Countess heard the report. She turned upon Fortunata and gave vent to a squelching tirade, spoken in the withering style that only a well-bred woman can affect. For once Fortunata lost her presence of mind; for once her famous caustic humor forsook her; she made but a surly reply. As soon as she had spoken, she was chilled with a sense of defeat. Her following had not giggled! Bitterness unspeakable! They had sided with the Countess. The next two or three days Fortunata's vanity fancied a change in her followers. They no longer gazed upon her with the same stare of inane worship. Napoleon at St. Helena had no more bitter sense of defeat. She retired to her room, and in solitude thought out an adequate revenge. On the morrow the Countess meant to celebrate one of her birthdays. Why should not Fortunata present her with an epigram, written in the Colibri's best

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manner? Praise be to Heaven for the remembrance of that sour style! Fired with resentment, she then and there composed a doggerel French verse. She had sufficient to say, for, like the precocious child that she was, she had heard all the old Spanish scandals.

When dawned the eventful morrow, all the school was gathered in the dining-room, and in sailed Madame la Comtesse, to receive her birthday tribute. When came Fortunata's turn—"Alas!" she said, "I have nothing to offer but a slight effusion of my muse, dedicated to you, Countess."

"Read it, my child," said the amiable woman, for though disappointed, she was invariably gracious.

Outwardly as bold as a lion, Fortunata stood forth, and in a clarion voice she trumpeted these lines:

"Les châteaux en Espagne, Comtesse,
S'évanouissent l'orsqu'on vieillit;
On perd la sublime jeunesse;
On perd le printemps de la vie;
On perd l'amour et la tendresse;
On perd l'amant, on perd l'ami;
On perd enfin tout ce qu'on peut;
Et les dents et les cheveux;
Mais les chauves dînent, Dieu merci;
On ne perdra jamais l'appétit."

Or, to paraphrase freely:

"Our Spanish castles fade, Madame,
As we grow old, as we grow old;
Gone is the joy of youth, Madame,
And life's gay spring, all green and gold.
Aye, even love, also, Madame!
Must have an end, must have an end;

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Our gallants go their way, Madame,
And we are left without a friend.
'Tis all a losing game, Madame,
Full many a charm we ill can spare
Time's envious maw doth glut, Madame,
Including both our teeth and hair.
But, nathless, be consoled, Madame,
The cloud has still its lining bright;
The bald may dine! Thank God, Madame,
We do not lose our appetite!"

There was an ominous, an awful silence; then burst the storm. Terrible was the wrath of Madame la Comtesse, and terrible the words she chose to employ. Although it was to the old spider's loss to release any of the flies she had entangled in her web, she then and there dismissed Fortunata forever from her sight. But what did Fortunata care? Once more she basked in the gaze of sixty pairs of wonder-struck eyes. She had regained her aureole!

After her dismissal, Fortunata wrote to her aunt to send Miss Billford or a servant to bring her home. In spite of her escapade, she was not afraid to face the Princess. She had always been the favorite, and any proof of independence delighted the eccentric old woman. It never occurred to Fortunata to conciliate her mother. The Princess Colibri was the only authority the Rivallo children knew.

Until her escort came Fortunata was reduced to staying in her room, where she still had the means of making herself disagreeable, for the partitions were so thin that her voice could be distinctly heard by any one passing in the corridors. Therefore, from morning to night she sang her epigram; she droned it like a Gregorian chant. The third day old Nello

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came to release her and to take her home. At the Palazzo door they were solemnly greeted by the *portiere*, a species of majordomo, a striking feature of the palace, who received all the visitors' cards and adorned the court-yard with his ornate presence. A gorgeous object was the Princess Colibri's *portiere*, clad in all the colors of the rainbow. He had legs that would be the envy of an English flunky, a cocked hat upon his brow, ambrosial whiskers upon his cheeks, and a commanding staff within his hand.

"Where is the Princess?" asked Fortunata.

"Her Excellency is in the garden, Contessina," he replied, addressing her by the title—"little Countess"—used to distinguish her from her mother, the Contessa.

Sure enough, in the garden back of the Palazzo, sunning herself on a stone bench amid the sound of church-bells and the penetrating odor of box, Fortunata found her Excellency sitting in state. She was more gorgeous than an Eastern idol. Upon her head a radiant bird of paradise; behind her, Miss Billford, with an amber-tinted parasol, protecting the glorious fowl from the rays of the sun. At her feet, crouching in the guise of worshippers, her two little pet dogs, Mimi and Ganymede, even fatter and sleeker than in the last holidays.

"Good-morning, Spindleshanks," was her Excellency's greeting.

"Good-morning, Princess," Fortunata answered, in a hollow voice, for she saw the necessity of playing her cards with care.

"Good-morning, Miss Billford. Good-morning,

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lovely Mimi and adorable Ganymede. Princess, I shall ask you to excuse Miss Billford. What I have to say is for your private ear."

"Billford," said the Princess, "leave us. Take my book, my gloves, my parasol. Take also my little dogs. They have sat too long in the sun. It is vain for you to whistle. You only emit an asthmatic wheeze. No dog, however intelligent, could understand. You will have to carry Mimi and Ganymede. When not annoyed, they are gentle—I doubt if they bite you."

As soon as Miss Billford had taken her departure, timidly bearing off under each arm a fat and pompous little animal, Fortunata's aunt turned to her, and said in an abstracted voice, "Serpent that I have warmed in my bosom, what have you done?"

"Princess," Fortunata answered, "what should I not have done, without the example that I have had as a child constantly before my eyes of the powers of sarcasm?" Here Fortunata bowed to her Excellency. Then with an art worthy of a courtier she told her story. Her diplomacy was effective. She had said but little when the Princess interrupted:

"When next I am in Paris I shall go down to this lady's pied à terre, and before I leave her she shall be ventre à terre." And when Fortunata mentioned the English hoydens—

"Pouf!" said her Excellency. "When they read aloud they tremble at sight of an unexpected H. They are the daughters of middle-class merchants, petty shopkeepers; they are unfit companions for you."

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When Fortunata had finished her discourse and spoken her epigram, never was mentor more delighted. Her Excellency crowed for joy. She clapped her hands, she smiled like an ogress. She declared that Fortunata had created a *chef d'œuvre*, that she herself could have written nothing better, that Fortunata was a joy, a jewel, a poppet; that not only was she clever, brilliant, but that, really, she was getting good-looking. Her Excellency gave Fortunata *carte blanche* to spend her days as she chose—an *esprit* such as hers needed no schooling. Then, in a final ecstasy, the Colibri stretched up a bare wiry arm, tied at the wrist with a bow, and raising two fingers in the apostolic blessing, she called down from the radiant vault a benediction on Fortunata's talented young head.

Fortunata's speech had been tactful, and she had expected a measure of success, but she was astounded by the ovation she received.

CHAPTER III

BEFORE Fortunata's departure for school her half-sister Antonia had made her début. This girl's wild and melancholy beauty, then the style in Rome, where the type admired alters like the fashions, caused her success. Though dark almost to swarthy, her face had that effulgent power of expression seen only in the women of the South; her eyes were walls of light; her smile tender and brilliant; across her face there shifted a play of sun and shadow that gave her, if a trifle crazed, at least a caressing expression. At her first ball she danced twice with the Marchese Dacampagna. In the *Griseries de la Valse*, of which she had read so much, she smelled the pomade of his mustache and fell ardently in love. In a month she was married to Dacampagna. The Marchese, a Florentine, was not of the oldest nobility, but he possessed large means—a rare phenomenon in Italy. He had social aspirations. Rome seemed to him full of possibilities. He decided to live there. The doors of the Palazzo Colibri opened to Antonia again, this time with her husband, for which hospitality the Colibri named and received her price. Her Excellency had, among other more assumed failings, a frugal nature.

The first years of this marriage put the passion

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of Romeo and Juliet to shame. Alas! these halcyon days were not to last. Antonia discovered that her Romeo, the god of her idolatry, was an ordinary mortal, possessed of those gross faults that revolt a woman essentially sentimental and idealistic. Bitter quarrels broke out between the ex-turtle doves. Their bickerings were promoted by the amiable Princess. Antonia fell into a fathomless despair, and turned from her love to the consolations of Mother Church. Santa Maria Maggiore saw her every day. Like all the afflicted of Heaven, she took a dreary satisfaction in her woes; she was apt to say, "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." The tender Juliet was gone, and in her place was daily to be contemplated a saintly, edifying, but lugubrious martyr. In spite of Antonia's Medusa-like airs and Lady Macbeth attitudes, evoked by a piece of underdone mutton or by the smell of cooking or by any of the trivialities of life; in spite of her absurdities, exaggerations, and lack of humor, there was something pathetic and lovable in this woman's nature, something infinitely touching in her need and craving for affection.

Following Fortunata's return from school, there began for her two years of *dolce far niente*, of wasteful, sunlit, unimproving days, hours passed in solitude with only her thoughts for companions—her thoughts, that no one could share, nor take away! Here were no companions playing at leap-frog. Here was no row of whitewashed cells for piano practice, no dreary little boxes through whose partitions each player was heard thumping her individual piece—all thundering together in one conglomerate-

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tion of hideous sound. Here the only notes to disturb her reveries were from Francesca, screwed to a music-stool.

When Eugenio came home from England for the holidays, Fortunata was disappointed. She had hoped to find a congenial spirit, but Eton had sadly narrowed him. He talked of nothing but his boys' clubs and his debating societies. By reason of his lack of entertaining conversation, Fortunata found her brother's company boring in the extreme, and chose in preference the joys of solitude.

The Countess del Santa Cruz had sometimes sent a few of her lambs, shepherded by one of her daughters, to witness heavy tragedies by Corneille and Racine, wherein dreary people in togas stalked and gesticulated, holding in their hands scrolls of manuscript and bundles of papyrus. Incredibly dull as were these plays, nevertheless Fortunata remembered how her heart would beat when from the stage resounded those three primitive knocks, peculiar to the Théâtre Français, as the signal for the curtain to rise. But now, with the advent of Madame Sarah Bernhardt in Rome, were forgotten the lugubrious Andromaches, Iphigenias, and Medeas, in contemplating the agonies of the divine actress. The Colibri allowed her niece to attend the theatre whenever so inclined, on condition that Miss Billford accompanied her and that Fortunata paid for the tickets. The Princess and Antonia shared a box at both the Argentina and the Costanzi theatres. Fortunata's mother was never with them; busy counting out pills and draining medicine bottles, she had forgotten that one could be happy. Fortunata,

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not being as yet introduced to society, must needs sit in an orchestra chair, surrounded by the *hoi polloi*. Miss Billford blushed whenever she understood—at “Sapho,” “La Città Morta,” and “Cleopatra.” Between the acts Fortunata craned her neck to see her relatives, resplendent in their box.

At “La Tosca,” given on Tuesday, the fashionable night, the Princess appeared in a glory of green ostrich-plumes, her neck and arms bejewelled with the famous Colibri emeralds. She shone and glittered more than any jeweller’s window; she was surrounded by an escort of old bucks, bravely grinning in the face of death, doddering age, and rheumatism. The Princess was holding forth on Bernhardt’s failing powers, and, amid an appreciative tee-heeing, her Excellency nodded her feathery aureole, waved her sparkling arms and gave an imitation of the actress’s voice and gestures.

Antonia had thrown a gauzy veil over the splendor of her shoulders. She too held her court, amid which, alas, Dacampagna was not visible. She took her homage haughtily and sadly, like the Empress Semiramis, rewarding her admirers with a vague smile or an intense murmur. In spite of her sojourns at Santa Maria Maggiore, and her ardent prayers, she had not found the “peace that passeth understanding.” For what, kind Heaven, were all these prayers, offerings, and pious distractions, but to win back a most unworthy heart, not worth the possessing, to regain the love, such as it was, of Guido, that fickle Romeo whose unstable fancy had wandered elsewhere? That Antonia still loved him was due, Guido fancied, to his charms and his mus-

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tachios. Alas, for his vanity—he and his like are worshipped merely because some women possess the talent of knowing how to love. The privilege of having a heart to give away is costly, and this is why Antonia appeared more tragic than Bernhardt herself enacting the woes of *La Tosca*.

From her brother-in-law, Guido Dacampagna, Fortunata wheedled a riding-horse, a mare, black as night and with nostrils as red as though they had been rouged. Fortunata named the beast Zuleika, after a favorite heroine.

Early every morning she would order Zuleika saddled and ride out with Nello as her escort. In the freshness of the day the bells were ringing to church, through the streets the devout Carmelites and barefooted Capuchins were strolling to mass. Zuleika in her flight caused seminaries of young priests to scatter right and left. These petticoated boys, like to gaunt, raw-boned peasant women, grinned under their shovel hats to see Zuleika caper by. Through the Corso and the by-streets, out onto the hard Appian Way, past squalid Borghi, where groups of brown imps cheered in derision, past aqueducts and catacombs, out into the vast sun-burnt Campagna. Zuleika rolled her black eyes, gripped the bit between her teeth, and darted like an arrow across the stretch of country. Fortunata would look back and laugh to see Nello and his asthmatic pony left wild-eyed on the horizon. In the sunlit gallops she met parties of hunters with brilliant scarlet coats—all the nobility out hunting the fox. But, like a well-trained maiden, she passed unseeing—with lowered eyelids.

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In those days Fortunata was a solitary, dreamy child. In a few weeks, as a result of a visit to the French capital, she became a young lady with Louis XV. heels, who loved the Parisian vanities, the pink pomades, the coquettish clusters of false curls.

She visited Hallée, Paquin, Doucet; she coveted the crazy hats of Mesdames Réboux, Roger, and the inspired Alphonsine. She loved the daintiest dinners, the sweetest, the most penetrating perfumes. Fortunata found that she was born to be comfortable, to appreciate luxury, to have all the pretty things of earth. In the face of her coming campaign—for the following winter she was to make her début—the Princess declared that her favorite niece lacked that artificial chic, the stamp of the world, and hoped that Paris might prove a stimulus. There she knew one was apt to give the body more than a thought. On the way to the French capital, her Excellency held forth on the necessity of uncomfortable shoes, high heels, tight corsets, diet—in short, *il faut souffrir pour être belle*.

“It is all very well to be clean, but, Santa Maria, one needs a little style.”

To all of which Fortunata inclined her blond and pensive head. In the Hôtel Grosvenor, Rue Auber—Italians when travelling choose small and rather cheap hotels—the Princess and Fortunata took up their residence. From morning to night they visited the fountainheads of fashion, and feverishly imbibed the new modes. The Colibri was intimate with all the artists of the Rue de la Paix. Many were the afternoons passed by the Princess and Fortunata in the sanctum of Mademoiselle Suzanne,

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the arbiter of fashion, the dictator at whose word the vogue of sleeves with puffs passes and that of the leg-o'-mutton shape is ushered in. When Mademoiselle Suzanne ceased to wrestle with the inspiration of her genius in the creation of Fortunata's coming-out dress, she made herself agreeable relating naughty stories of the *demi-mondaines* and *cocottes* of the season. The Colibri, whom no one could accuse of having a refined mind, was moved by these tales to guffaws of horse-laughter.

Nothing speaks worse for Paris than the genuine admiration, respect, and enthusiasm it tenders to its *cocottes* and painted tragedies in general. The saleswomen, Mesdemoiselles Eulalie, Marie, Louise, kowtow more obsequiously to a gaudy Jezebel than to the most virtuous, wealthy, brilliant woman of society. Schools for a cynic are these palaces of fashion. A great many women will own to not being as beautiful as Venus; only one in a trillion would care to be thought as wise as Minerva; very few assume a rôle as chaste as that of Diana; but who does not think in her heart that she has a "style" all her own! Fortunata herself, when skipping into new creations, before enthusiastic French saleswomen, blushed with pleasure, though conscious of not looking her best, at ecstatic exclamations—"The waist of a sylph!" "The leg of a coryphée!" Many was the useless horror she was wheedled into buying merely because la belle Otero had its mate, or because the notorious la Vallière had ordered its counterpart.

The Colibri talked with her niece frankly of life and what might be made of it. At the Ritz, every

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afternoon, she snickered at the world over her tea and éclairs.

"That, Fortunata," said the Princess, pointing, "is a German. See how she stares at my wig and mutters *abscheulich!* Poor savage, what does she know of dress? Her language proves it. That is an American. I know her by the courage with which she wears that hat. Look at the Frenchwomen about us. Their charm is full of contradiction. Yonder one, with the plover-colored circles about her eyes, might have just flung a faithless lover back his letters, when, in truth, she is only laced too tightly. Over there is a cocotte—la Vallière, by-the-way. There she sits in her sables like a fashion-plate out of *Le Chic Parisien*. But meet her glance and see—she has the eyes of a primitive race."

Fortunata smiled courteously. How my garrulous old aunt, she thought, does spout on!

"But, Fortunata," continued the mentor, "the cocotte has one serious fault—she lacks foresight. Until come the horrors of age, she smirks and skips, like those shallow daughters of Sodom and Gomorrah who were conjured in vain to cease clashing their cymbals and piping on their sackbuts and dulcimers, but who in spite of all remonstrance revelled in the Tyrian purple, delighted in the grape and kissed the black-bearded warriors of the East."

The old worldling ceased, held up part of an éclair, and pensively let it slip into her mouth.

The Princess's remarks were not restricted to the female frequenters of the Ritz. She had kindly determined to single out for Fortunata a desirable husband. Opportunities of marriage were, therefore,

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her constant theme. Every man that passed her table was either the Colibri's friend, acquaintance, or more often her enemy. If he were none of these, at least she knew his name, his history, the amount of his income, his debts, his mistress, and the speed of his hunters. A thousand times, in imagination, did her Excellency marry Fortunata to all the Serene Highnesses of the land.

"That is the Prince Raoul de la Tour Bichelle!" cried the Princess, one day, pointing to a tripping old beau in a buff waistcoat. "He is as old as Methuselah, rich as Croesus, and wicked as Silenus. If he comes to Rome, I am determined you shall marry him. And why should you not? More wonderful things have happened. Did not Esther become the queen of Ahasuerus?"

Thrice blessed was Fortunata in her instructress.

She did not depend upon her aunt alone to make of her an accomplished woman. She determined by mere force of will to grow pretty. She had narrow eyes to combat and irregular features. Her face, though vivid, had not one curve of the divine beauty which she so worshipped. She began with her hair. Her aching arms, held above her head by the hour, learned to wave, to curl, to undulate. She took to cold cream and almond washes, and the rouge-pot was with her always. She paced the apartment, balancing on her head the waste-paper basket, thus hoping to attain a smooth and sinuous gait like that of the Eastern women. To gain a waist, she banted, very nearly starved, and had she not possessed the sweetest of tempers would have grown unbearably peevish.

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The Princess turned toward Italy, and started with her niece for Rome. Fortunata was altered beyond recognition, though her transformation was no more remarkable than those revolutions of character which we constantly witness. The engines hooted a warning, the fields ran past, the telegraph-posts leaped by, and, breathless, gasping, hysterical, the train sobbed into the station at Rome. Fortunata, balancing on her stilts of heels, directed the placing of her trunks and much-becounted hat-boxes, then sedately entered the omnibus which had been sent to meet them. She speculated on the bobbing of one of her Excellency's curls all the way to the Palazzo. The majordomo threw wide the doors and displayed his beautiful legs. In the hall Fortunata's mother was expostulating with Francesca, who was seeking to fasten the Contessa's placket. It was part of this unhappy lady's misfortune never to be completely dressed. She lacked either a belt or a collar or a shoe-button, and hers was a constant wail for pins.

Her first words were, "Princess, isn't it dreadful, Antonia has left?"

"Has left?" cried her Excellency, who scented a scandal. "With whom?"

"With Mariana, the cook. They have gone with flowers to one of the churches. The cook has been very sick, and now she is better, and they have been offering up things—that's why I'm so unprepared. I didn't know you were coming."

Fortunata waited to hear no more, but with the suggestion of a kiss for her mother betook herself to her room, still mind and soul with the hat-boxes.

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That night Fortunata, in her high-ceiled, chilly room, with its pungent odor of plaster and matting, stood candle in hand before the mirror and looked into the face of her reflection. At the first glance nothing remarkable—a pale girl with a pointed chin—yet out of the dusk of the greenish old mirror laughed two attractive, coffee-colored eyes—amused, audacious, like the eyes of a fawn. They gleamed and danced, as must have shone the glance of the waterwitch Undine when she was but a gay spirit of the floods, before she loved and gained a soul. Yet even as Fortunata looked, her eyes darkened and grew sad—almost to desperation—and the soul that had been lacking rose into their pupils, looked out and thought. Was the iris brown or gray, black or green? She could no more determine its color than could the lovers in the fairy tale tell the hue of the eyes of the princess. Charming, visionary face!

“Serve me well!” prayed Fortunata.

Then she called Hortense, her maid—she had procured her in Paris—undressed, blew out her candle and skipped into bed.

CHAPTER IV

HIS Eminence the Cardinal Santinello, spiritual consoler to the Queen Mother, a pillar of the Church, and Antonia's guide, philosopher, and friend, took lunch at the Palazzo Colibri on the following morning, the first of December. It was a day so mild and of such blue skies that on leaving the dining-room for coffee in the *sala di ricevimento*, the wood fire that blazed in the chimney was scarcely needed. The Princess bade Nello fling open the long French windows. The Cardinal sat before the flames and toasted his square-toed shoes and neat scarlet stockings. His intelligent glance was raised toward the ceiling, and rested on "Hope" astride of a cloud, while through his handsome nostrils filtered the smoke of a cigarette. Patiently he smiled on his disciple Antonia, who held forth on the mysteries of table-tipping, her last craze. With the sun on his back, and the fire at his feet, the Cardinal was content.

"Eminenza," Antonia cried, "I cannot believe that death cuts us off forever from those we have loved. Even on earth we can speak to them, I am sure."

"Who knows?" yawned Santinello, showing his white teeth.

"Eminenza," the Colibri interposed, laughing,

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"Antonia has been everything from a Kneipist to a suffragette. I have seen her wear Reform-kleiden and go about in a bag. Now she watches all the corners, looking for the dead—her eyes, like a cat's, following up and down the movements of some invisible thing. It is unnerving." And the Princess threw back her wicked, snout-shaped face.

"Such enthusiasms are natural to a woman of the Marchesa's fire and temperament," the Cardinal contented himself by saying.

As for Antonia, she made no response, but returned from the spirit-world long enough to cast her aunt a tolerant glance, then continued with her table-tippings in a voice as deep as Schumann-Heink's, and even more tragic.

Then it was that Nello, coming in to take the coffee-cups, whispered to the Princess.

"Guido," her Excellency cried, "Luigi has come from Florence and is here! See Guido's long face, Eminenza. This Luigi is the black sheep, a younger brother, a rouge et noir devotee. He has come to borrow money, if you call borrowing extorting that which you are determined never to repay."

At the news Guido, who till then had been staring stupidly at the fire, started to his feet and began pacing the floor, muttering.

"My brother is here, then?" he demanded.

"Yes, Eccellenza." The Marchese exacted this title from the servants, although, not being in the diplomacy, he had no right to it.

"What did my brother say?" questioned Dacampagna.

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"Don Luigi told me to inform your Excellency of his arrival."

"Accidente! Then why didn't you do so?"

Men of Guido's disposition show their authority by pretending to misunderstand their servants, and by having with them long, violent explanations.

Tired with Guido's blustering talk, "Show in Don Luigi!" commanded the Princess. Then, turning to Fortunata, "A most magnetic man. Is he not, Antonia? When you were at school, Fortunata, Luigi stayed here. He has his faults, no doubt, appears a little like the hero of a cheap French novel, uses perhaps too much pomade and bear grease. You might know by the look of him that he was disinherited. As a younger son, he received almost nothing, and that nothing he soon gambled, squandered, flung away. Persistent ill luck at Monte Carlo left him as poor as a church rat. His father, a pompous old merchant, would have turned in the grave at seeing the bright *lire* fly. Don't look at me like that, Guido, you know your father was a merchant, and bought his title in Humberto's reign. Madre de Dios!" cried the Princess, pointing, "see, the Marchesa is making herself lovely!" For Antonia had broken off in her spiritual talk, drawn from a vase a long-stemmed rose, and was pinning it to the folds of her dress. Her eyes were fixed on the door, and twin roses bloomed on either cheek.

"Don Luigi Dacampagna!" announced Nello, and in swaggered a young man, with his chin in the air, in a haughty yet debonair fashion. Of course, he was pale—how could a younger son, the squanderer

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of a fortune and a gambler, be otherwise? So pale was he that across his face the ends of his waxed mustache made two dark lines like thin, black scars. In the centre of the room he stopped abruptly, clapped his heels together, and inclined his chin over a spruce, high collar.

The two brothers shook hands, and affectingly kissed each other on both cheeks. The salute was performed with silent though dramatic warmth on the part of the new-comer, with very ill grace on that of his host. Don Luigi then continued his dandified progress. To the Princess he made a bow, and brushed his mustache over the one finger she resigned him. He kissed the Cardinal's ring, then to Antonia he turned with his all-conquering airs and took her outstretched hand.

"Marchesa," said he, "you had not thought to see me so soon again. Was I wrong in coming and not warning you?" His voice had a dramatic quality, and at these seemingly harmless words Antonia cast down her eyes.

"My husband's brother is always welcome," she said.

"Antonia is even lovelier, Luigi mio?" the Princess asked. "She has hair enough to play Lady Godiva; she is all eyes and curves—a Juno."

"No, Princess," answered Don Luigi, "better a Madonna. The Marchesa has a more tender and divine expression."

"What do you think of Fortunata, Luigi?" asked the Princess, in her bold, disconcerting voice.

Don Luigi wheeled to make his bow. It is not etiquette to kiss the hand of a young girl. "Ah,

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Contessina!" And he admired Fortunata over his spiky mustache.

"Isn't it strange, Don Luigi," she said, "that you and I have never met before?" And she gave him her hand, gravely, but as though she liked him.

"I was never fortunate," said Don Luigi, still looking at Fortunata. But who can be called unfortunate who has the gift of pleasing? For his eyes, every woman liked Don Luigi. His was not the Frenchman's stare, but a glance all tenderness, all ardor, which he never failed to bestow even on a hag. Don Luigi, with large gestures, gave the story of his ill luck—for roulette, it seems, he had discovered a system, faultless, infallible, mathematical, a system to make a man a multi-millionaire, had he but sufficient capital for the start. With Southern eloquence, he evoked the scene of Monte Carlo—the great, hot rooms, the intent figures crowding round the gaming-table, the feathers on the women's hats seeming to tremble with suspense, the eager hands outstretched to make the bet. "Rien ne va plus!" A hush, only the whirl of the ball, a sharp, dry sound, then silence. With a rush comes the storm of voices, excited or triumphant, while here and there a forlorn figure turns and slinks despondent away. As Don Luigi ceased, he looked at his hearers in turn—at Fortunata, at Antonia; the latter said nothing, still kept her eyes downcast, but she seemed to listen—an unusual thing in this visionary.

"Bravo!" cried the Princess, as with outflung arms the dramatic speaker ceased. Don Luigi was a favorite with her Excellency. She called him

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Lothario and Don Juan. "See the brothers, Eminenza. Luigi is all youth and spirit and fire; then look at Guido. Santa Madonna! one might as well compare a Mercury with a drunken Centaur."

This proved too much for Guido, who turned on his heel and went growling from the room.

Antonia lifted to her aunt her dark, reproachful eyes.

"Ah, the dear Signorina Billford!" cried Luigi, and he pointed to a recess where, against the faded tapestry, Francesca, Eugenio, and the governess were deep in a game of checkers. Eugenio, with his hands in his waistcoat pockets, was supervising the play of the two women. He was grown a slender, dressy young man, with a healthy aversion for anything like work. He lolled through two or three hours of the morning in the company of an English tutor, supposed to be coaching him for Oxford. The Conte had outgrown the enthusiasms of his Eton days. He was now of a melancholy turn of mind, thought of taking up literature as a career, and spent much time in a flowered dressing-gown, reading French novels to improve his style.

At this time of year night comes with a bound. The Princess bade Nello pull to the windows and unfold the shutters, carved with masques and gargoyles. The only light was that of the fire, in whose glow the room found something of its lost splendor. Guido appeared in the doorway, candle in hand to light his Eminence down the stairs.

"Luigi," said Dacampagna, casting his brother an ugly look, "where are you staying?"

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"While Luigi is in Rome," interposed the Princess, "he is staying under my roof."

"As you please, Eccellenza," said Guido, turning purple.

The Cardinal arose and held up two fingers in the apostolic blessing. The others crowded about him to kiss his ring.

First, the Princess Colibri bowed her stiff old knees; then Antonia, seizing Santinello's hand, kissed the amethyst as though she owed it her life; next, Luigi hastened to press his lips on the stone, yet he looked rather at Antonia than at his Eminence. Even Miss Billford touched the jewel with her strictly Episcopalian nose—she did so with shrinking, as though inhaling from a bottle of powerful smelling-salts.

Santinello stepped into the darkness of the hall. Guido and the candle followed, while Luigi, having bowed with the grace of a dancing-master, swung out, hand on hip.

Fortunata leaned over the banister and looked into the well of blackness. The three men went down the stairs: first stepped Santinello, flip-flop in his long robes; next followed Guido with candle held on high, and lastly came Luigi's lithe figure. As the little flame wound down into blackness, her sister joined her. Antonia's gaze—the gaze of the visionary—strayed down into the gloom.

"Fortunata," she asked, "did you ever feel as though somehow to-morrow would be different, happier, more complete than was to-day? Did you ever say to yourself, 'To-morrow I shall be satisfied'?"

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"Yes," Fortunata answered, "it is a kind of mental toothache."

Antonia's queer, humid eyes met her sister's.

"Vero, vero!" she murmured, and the women turned back into the *sala*.

"Billford," the Colibri was saying, "are your knees made like other people's—can you bend them? Eugenio, Francesca, pile up some cushions in that chair; they shall be his Eminence. We'll teach Miss Billford to bow the knee less stiffly."

"Listen," said Antonia, holding up her hand, "that is Don Luigi's voice. Buona notte, Eminenza!" she added, in a whisper, as though awed. "Those are my two friends. It is better to have a friend than all the love on earth."

"What's your opinion on that, Billford?" asked the Princess, never tired of jeering the old governess. The harassed Billford, weary of the enforced ceremonies, brightened.

"Miss Burney in *Evelina*," said she, "gives a most beautiful definition—"

"Va bene, Nello!" interrupted the Princess, and turning her back on Billford, she steamed through the door, past the old servant, who, with gray head obsequiously bent, stood, candle in hand, waiting to light her Excellency through the rat-haunted hall.

CHAPTER V

NEXT morning Fortunata, submerged in the Lethe of sleep, struggled up to the light through fathomless waters. As she lay still in the cool, dark, high-ceiled room, she was aware of a sense of well-being. It's good to be young and pretty and have the world before you, and the hope of being famous. For famous Fortunata knew she ultimately would be—she had always known it. When only ten, she would practise her signature against the days when enthusiasts should send her their albums.

On such a morning who could lie abed? Fortunata threw on her wrapper and sprang for the nearest window. What freshness! The morning smelled like a rose. During the night it must have rained, for everything glistened and the garden looked as though its face had just been washed. Somewhere a hidden singer carolled "La Bell' Amica." The man's rounded notes soared up into the air, and the commonplace song gained a certain sincerity when flung out in challenge at full voice:

"Light in the morning and joy in youth,
But how should I laugh when my heart is afire?
She gave me a glance, a side-glance,
And I burn, I perish like a flame—
Whose cruel eyes have the power to haunt me?
To haunt, to trouble, nay, to distract me?—
You know but too well, la bell' Amica!"

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Fortunata raised her arms and took to teasing her hair into curls. Suddenly she paused. In the hall "Coco, Coco!" murmured an insidious voice. It is Luigi, thought Fortunata; he must see my wrapper! and she pounced into the corridor. Don Luigi, on one knee, like a troubadour, was coaxing a battered, disreputable parrot of seafaring appearance and bandy-legged as well. Coco's whole attitude expressed his perception of humor. He fixed at intervals the would-be charmer with a critical, uncanny eye, then glanced down his own beak, in coquettish derision.

"Ah, Don Luigi!" exclaimed Fortunata, affecting surprise.

"Ah, Contessina!" cried Don Luigi, starting up. "Such a morning as this accursed bird has caused me to pass! I have pursued him through every corridor, and still, you see, impossible to approach him." Here he bowed to Fortunata so low that she could see the parting that ran through his well-pomaded hair, from his forehead to the nape of his neck.

Fortunata looked at him through her eyelashes.

"It was you this morning that sang 'La Bell' Amica'?"

"Yes." He was gratified. "Did you like it?"

"Yes." And with an abrupt change of manner, "Watch me drive Coco." She pursued the reluctant bird. With outspread wings and resentful squawk, Coco scurried down the hall. In his agitation, he squalled a ribald ballad in imitation of a drunken sailor, who, after praising the *vino rosso*, calls on his *bella* to sit once more upon his knee.

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At a turning of the hall they came face to face with the Colibri. The Princess wore an ermine dressing-gown and a skull-cap drawn low over her brow. It was later in the day that her Excellency bloomed into feathers and curls. "Coco mio!" she was whining, and her eyes were as round and wicked as the parrot's. Indignantly the bird waddled past the Princess to his perch.

"Buon giorno, Luigi," said the Colibri. Then, contemplating Fortunata, "You have very little on." As though struck by a sudden thought, the Princess tiptoed across the hall, her wrapper trailing with a furtive sound. She made for one of the doors, pushed it open, and behold! there sat Antonia before her glass brushing out her cloud of hair. The Princess, still holding the door wide open, protested, apologized: "Have you just waked? Scusi, Antonia." Then she drew to the door, beckoned Fortunata, and went tiptoeing back through the halls with an agility that was somehow horrible in such an old and heavy woman.

Only in the most romantic books does the entrance of the heroine cause a hush to fall upon the ball-room. At her *début*, a few days later, though looking her best, Fortunata achieved no such electrical effect.

That night the English Ambassadors, Lady Bolton, gave a dinner to introduce the Honorable Misses Bolton, two hard-washed young ladies in starchy muslin. Into the dressing-room Fortunata entered, head high in air. Here were six *débutantes* palpitating on the threshold, six brown necks and twelve

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collar-bones surrounded by muslin ruffs. A battered-looking lady, bruised about the eyes, her teeth studded with gold, her hair calling for regilding, stood before the mirror powdering her nose. She had a repaired, mended look. Out of the corners of her eyes Fortunata studied the rival *débutantes* and recognized her fellow dancing-school pupils of a year ago—only a year ago—was it possible?

I needn't be afraid of these girls, she thought.

At last she of the looking-glass removed her bulk, gave her gloves a nautical twitch suggestive of a hornpipe, yanked up her train and trundled away. On passing the *débutantes* she nodded good-temperedly, in the manner of an intrepid swimmer who, striking out for the sea, flings back encouragement to the shiverers in the surf. The *débutantes* surged up to Fortunata.

"How my heart beats!" said the ringleader—no other than Fortunata's long-time friend, Loulou del Coco, the same Loulou, plump and busy, always slightly breathless from the round of futile duties.

Fortunata led the procession, and the vestals filed through the doorway. Lady Bolton's fat, damp hand enveloped the Contessina's. The English Ambassadors was burdened with sorrows, years, and fat.

"Henry, this is the Signorina Rivallo."

Lord Bolton bowed to Fortunata. He resembled Father Time.

No one else was presented. The roof served as an introduction, after the English fashion. Fortunata set herself to learning the names of the guests. She drifted about among the different groups, and

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talked glibly. There were the Conte and Contessa Torrigiano, the Conte and Contessa Chiostra, two newly married couples, apparently inseparable, all four. There were Englishmen from the Embassy, and foreign *attachés*. There was some one with genius and long hair whom no one seemed to know. Mr. Hackburth was there, the keen-faced American Ambassador, with his wife, a woman who, plain and suppressed all her youth, had now burst out, to the amazement of all, in a sort of Indian summer.

Time dragged on and dinner was not announced. Whispers came from near the door. People turned, and into the room strode a strapping young woman.

"The American!" said some one. "Miss Case!" murmured somebody else.

"Une originale!" said the French *attaché* to Fortunata, putting up her eye-glass.

"I am late?" asked the new-comer, in a staccato voice.

"Very," answered Lady Bolton.

"Too bad! The bell-boy who generally hooks me up was out." A bomb could hardly have caused more sensation.

"What courage, what power of success these women have!" the Frenchman went on, offering his arm to Fortunata. "Even Lady Bolton, so fastidious—"

"Oh, Miss Case is an American," Fortunata answered, vaguely. After the Italian point of view the word "American" explained all eccentricities and impossible actions.

"She has no *dot*, I understand?"

"Oh, all Americans are rich!" Fortunata averred, naïvely, and they sat down to dinner.

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In the centre of the table lay a mound of flowers, suggesting somehow a new-planted grave. Fortunata was struck by the abstraction, the laziness of the guests. She thought it strange that people should dress so gorgeously, wear jewels, eat off fine plate, and make no effort to live up to luxuries, nor by a little animation earn their good food. But all at once every one began to talk, and all together. Nobody listened, each shrieked louder than the other. The dinner finished in a clatter of noise, the ladies passed into the reception-room; the *débutantes*, replete and exhilarated, retired to a corner to discuss how low, when once married, they could wear their gowns. Miss Case, indeed, might have been a bigamist, if lack of clothes meant marriage; yet somehow Fortunata's modest dress was more alluring than the other's bareness. She and Fortunata stood together, each scenting an enemy and a rival.

"Do you like my Salome gown?"

"It suits you," answered Fortunata, courteously.

"You're not an Italian, are you? You're too attractive."

"I am a mongrel."

Miss Case began to laugh, shaking a wreath of false curls as yellow as marigolds.

"Aren't they funny?" she asked, pointing to the *débutantes*. Then suddenly, in a burst of confidence: "To break into Italian society is like taking candy from children. I didn't expect to find it such a cinch."

Singular person, thought Fortunata, to whom such language was obscure.

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The men now came in. The long-haired genius was asked to recite. He said he couldn't. He had a cold—he didn't dare! Everybody cried: "Oh, please do! Somebody make him!" Finally he told about Count Ugo in the Tower eating the dead children, and everybody talked him down.

Fortunata sat by the fire, with most of the men, though she was unconscious of having done anything to attract them. Later, one of the Englishmen moved his scalp for the pleasure of the company, twitched his ears, cracked his knuckles. He was looked at with interest, and the party broke up.

Fortunata drove home sure of success, impressed not so much with her own cleverness as with the idiocy of the world in general. She had hardly reached her room when trailing steps and the whistle of asthmatic breathing warned her of the approach of the Princess. Fortunata opened the door. The Colibri held a cashmere shawl up to her jowls, that hung down as pale and polished as ivory.

"This is a pleasure," said Fortunata, and she placed some cushions in her arm-chair. The Princess let herself down into a sitting posture, cracking in every joint and breathing with the noise of a dredge. Half undressed, her hair on her shoulders, the young girl described the evening, imitating, gesticulating, with the eagerness of a child.

"And the funniest was an American, my age, a crazy creature, and so pushing."

"One must be obtrusive to obtrude."

"I wish you could have heard them talk—rot, Zia, rot! Most people are such fools!"

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"They are; never forget it. Nothing is more numbing than respect for others. It makes diffidence. Take every human being as your tool, your prey, if need be; if you don't use them, they'll use you. Determine to be some one. Make up your mind to be heard of. Ah, Fortunata," said the Princess, drawing herself up to her feet and flinching with rheumatism, "famous or infamous, what's the odds, so long as you leave your mark?" She turned in the doorway with lowered head, her chin sagging on her breast. "Go ahead and make your life—this is the advice of one who loves you. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

THE next night, at twelve, the Princess's barouche drew up before the Palazzo in a drizzling rain. Her Excellency would have starved rather than give up her fine carriage, sleek horses, her overfed coachman and groom.

"It is raining," said Fortunata's mother, peering sadly into the mist. "I have said since five to-day that it would rain. I have felt it by my bronchitis."

"When one has so many presentiments, some of them must come true," sneered the Princess, sweeping by, and she took her place in the barouche, followed by Antonia, Fortunata, Guido, and Luigi, who crammed themselves in as best they might.

Luigi, seated opposite Antonia, fixed on her his fervent eyes, while all the time unperceived he held one of Fortunata's hands as in a vise.

The carriage drew up at the French Embassy. Monsieur de Quimpère was giving a cotillon in his daughter's honor. Five rows of gilt chairs edged the ball-room. The back seats overflowed with mothers, dowagers, chaperones, and benchwomen, who kept rearing up to see the dancing, calling on their daughters and climbing over the other tiers to find their offspring, too long absent from the maternal side. Between the dances the breathless *débutantes* were brought back and dumped beside

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their respective chaperones. The young men passed, all animation, all gayety, all desire to please and to be pleased. They were smartly dressed, well groomed, very correct, ultra English—Anglomania had lately seized Italy. It is a pity, for the Italians are an idealistic race, the Byronic becomes them, the *négligé* shirts and turn-down collars.

Many of the women were beautiful, many elegant, almost all dark. Like Antonia, they seemed abstracted, had momentary flashes of tenderness or childish annoyance at being stepped on or not being asked to waltz. Unlike the Northern women, they made no effort to disguise their feelings. If not invited to dance, they drooped frankly in a corner. Fortunata had found that she had entertained wrong ideas of the world, or at least of the Italian world. There was not the toadying to money and position that she had expected to find. On the contrary, the Romans are independent; they take people for what they are, paying respect to age, to beauty. The Italians were once a great people; they do not always forget it. Of course, if an American heiress comes to be married off, she will be treated with consideration—that is another question—a question of business.

The Colibri sat in the front row, her feet on the rounds of her chair to avoid the tread of the dancers. Had the waltzers been earning their daily bread, one must have pitied them. Between dances the Contessina Rivallo came decorously back to her aunt's side, yet her partners lingered. Fortunata was beginning already to taste the sweetness, the intoxication of success. She had come into her

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kingdom, the kingdom of the woman born to please. A sense of power ran in her veins like fire. Other *débutantes*, less gifted, sat with their mammas, quite forgotten. Their poor little heads marcelled and decked out to charm made one's heart ache.

"Eccellenza, where is Antonia?" asked Guido, fighting his way up and looking damp.

"Don't you see, hanging on to Luigi in the middle of the room? She's had him by the throat all evening. Some one has just knocked her comb out, and she is smiling reassurance through a rain of hair-pins."

In the arms of a tall officer, Miss Case was whirled past, uttering shrieks of delight as she bumped and disabled the other dancers.

"She has a handsome figure!" exclaimed Mr. Hackburth to the Princess.

"Pshaw!" the Princess answered; "she's laced to the shape of a bass viol."

"Oh, Mr. Hackburth!" cried Miss Case, rushing up, "please make me acquainted with the dear Princess Colibri."

Mr. Hackburth murmured an introduction. Miss Case had suffered a change since yesterday, and for the worse. Her frank breeziness was gone. Determined to be foreign, to be emotional, she grimaced and gabbled a ridiculous jargon. "I am ravished with meeting you!" she exclaimed. "Oh, dear me—chère amie—figure to yourself—oh, what is the English word!"

"Say it in French," the Princess answered; "I understand French."

Disgruntled, Miss Case found the English word.

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“And how long do you think I have been abroad?” she asked, on her second wind.

“I should judge, Mademoiselle, from the difficulty you have in speaking your own language, a very short while.”

“To know a gentleman, one must see him drunk,” announced the Princess, as they drove home in the early dawn. “Guido is repulsive. Mary in Heaven! Antonia’s hands are as cold as a dead lamb’s mouth—feel them, Luigi.”

Fortunata had come home blessedly tired, and was sitting on her bed, having kicked off her high-heeled slippers. She was smiling, thinking of her triumphs. She had been so entertained—above all, so entertaining that she had not eaten; now she felt the pangs of a harassing midnight hunger. She threw on her wrapper, caught up her candle, and passed like an agile ghost through the dark building. Avoiding the boards that creaked, the doors that groaned—from experience through youthful marauding expeditions—she came to the pantry, a cupboard that gave on the down-stairs hall. Disappointed in her gropings among the tea and sticks of cinnamon, she cautiously climbed the step-ladder and sought higher—here only brittle sticks of vermicelli and a cake of cooking chocolate. A chilly breath of air passed, and the candle flame wavered. At times mysterious draughts sighed through the palace. Again the breath. It blew the flame out, and Fortunata was in a heavy darkness. Close to her, it seemed, faint yet horribly distinct, came a sound. She stood motionless, frozen with horror.

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Again the sound! It spoke—and Fortunata knew Antonia's voice!

She came down the stairs, swung back the door and glanced into the hall. Within arm's reach of her, near a window and in the eerie lustre of the dawn, stood two figures—their faces luminously pale and their dark hair intermingled. The sleeves of a woman's kimono stirred against the man like sails vibrating in a breeze. All the gales of heaven might have blown, since the lovers had forgotten the wind and the cold, all, for each other's lips. The door swung to, discreetly, and Fortunata was in darkness. She heard Antonia say:

"Luigi, go!"

And he answered: "You have made me love you. I didn't dare to; I avoided you! What is it that you want? That I should give you up? How can I!"

Then, with a change of voice, Antonia cried: "No, but to love me! Kiss me, Luigi!"

Together, walking so near one to the other that they could have cast but one shadow, the woman and the man passed, holding each other by the hand, with a kind of rapturous sadness—for passion is melancholy, there being in this world no entire communion. The heart has ever before it the fear of change, of faithlessness, of satiety, of separation.

Fortunata stood in the dark, in an agony of sadness. Lightless, she groped her way up to bed. A curious fact it was that this selfish young girl knew more tenderness for her half-sister, the Marchesa, than for all other humans in the wide world; yet Antonia was forever immersed in herself, her senti-

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ments, her emotions, her moods, talking of her temperament everlastingly, vaporish and egotistical to a miracle.

For years the Marchesa had endured a miserable marriage. Now she had found a consoler, and this, according to the Italian point of view, was not only natural but inevitable. The part of Penelope was never understood on the Continent. Does a woman love her husband, him only, forever and at all times, Rome will smile and say, "She was eccentric always." Society looks on at so legitimate an affection with that half-scornful amusement one might feel toward a convert to Buddhism or a Kneipist, or toward a maniac who is persistent in going to bed in smoked glasses—"She was original, always, a great poseuse."

Although an Italian, Fortunata was yet disillusioned, bitterly hurt, as though her sister had failed her.

Who is truthful? she thought. Who is good? She herself was neither. Nevertheless, she admired in others such qualities without emulating them. Besides, in a family there must be some one to turn to, to count on, to believe in—some one with the simple, sterling, restful, old-fashioned virtues.

CHAPTER VII

FORTUNATA led a helter-skelter life, full of noise and bustle. She rode, visited, tea'd, all in a hurry. She danced until the sun was up, and as she passed to her carriage, her partners whispered to her. The *débutantes* said, "That is Fortunata Rivallo—isn't she pretty?" She was tired at times, mortally tired. The business seemed so aimless, she would say to herself, "What's it all for?" There wasn't one face at the ball, theatre, entertainment of any kind which she cared to see again. To keep in the fashion, she owed modiste, dressmaker, jeweller, right and left. She contracted debts with an ease worthy of her father. The dress of to-day was ordered without the means of paying to-morrow, and as for the debts of yesterday, she clean forgot them. Shop-people were lenient with her, as indeed was every one; her manner of owing—confiding, childlike—would have disarmed a Jew pawnbroker.

On the whole, those were joyous days. She never was again so happy. "To be happy," says the proverb, "one needs something to hope for, something to work for, and something to love." If a perpetual adoration of self answer to a human affection, Fortunata had a heart full of tenderness. As for hope, she longed for a husband, rich, influential—

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attractive, possibly; as for work, her enemies could not have accused her, at least where her social career was concerned, of carelessness, idleness, or self-indulgence. She was never so tired but she could sparkle and smile; never so sad but she could laugh and make others laugh; always on the *qui vive* for the right word, awake to the least intonation, alive to every point of view.

Fortunata's intimates discussed her freely. They were attached to her, nay, they were devoted. But was she beautiful, was she clever? Truth compelled them to say no—a thousand times no. Then why was it women infinitely prettier, incomparably more brilliant, failed to attain an equal popularity? Her friends philosophized on the shallow taste of men in general and the curious succession of accidents that go to make a groundless reputation. Fortunata's talisman, call it sympathy, magnetism, what you will, was an inheritance of her father's manner. Her manner was her genius. Between herself and even a five minutes' acquaintance, it implied a bond of sympathy, a secret tie. Her eyes, her inflections of voice seemed to say, "How charming, how witty, how unusual you are!" She made others eloquent. She spurred on their hobbies. "I" was a word she did not know; it was always "You, you!" Her "Yes" implied appreciation, understanding; her "Good-night" was an art; her handshake, warm and living, insinuated a caress. Her "Thank you" inspired a man to devote his life to her service.

Her desk was snowed under with invitations. Every day of the season a luncheon. Of an afternoon, drawn by her aunt's splendid horses, she

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drove the streets, distributed cards, and clasped the hands of distraught hostesses distributing tea. Night after night, dinner after dinner.

And the balls! She danced, and the fiddlers grew tired. She danced, and the candles burned down, the dowagers yawned, the old ladies put on their shawls, drew on their galoshes. But her partners were never weary. Pale, effulgent, the dawn rose and found her dancing still. If the next morning chanced to be a hunting-day, after three hours' sleep she might have been seen scouring the field on her lean hunter, her campaign hat bravely turned up in front, her stock prodigiously high, looking for all the world like a little Napoleon.

She had an army of suitors. She smiled upon the regiment; she encouraged her followers and played them off against one another. She saw them jealous, and was gratified. She saw them miserable, and was happy. She saw them foolish, and was hugely entertained. Yet she cared not a *lira* for the lot. Her suitors were mostly penniless. A life spent with such, to her taste would be but sordid.

"Why," she would ask, with admirable common-sense—"why encumber one's self with a husband if he can give one nothing?"

"Love is only love," the Princess Colibri would answer; "but money, Fortunata, is the world."

Her love-affairs were no pastime, but the study of an art—the art of subjugating hearts. To be desired, to be loved, to charm, requires so tremulous a sympathy, an interest in all surroundings so vital and bewitching, such patience, such endurance, so subtle a knowledge of the heart, that surely a pro-

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ficient flirt is no contemptible thing. To attract, Fortunata had long regarded as a paramount duty, and that not only as a duty, but as the necessary struggle to keep afloat in the social swim. In questions of love, hers was an unhappy nature—she belonged to that race of conquerors of men who delight only in the pursuit and grow indifferent to the ultimate gain. A man's devotion and the knowledge of it was not enough for her. The world must know. The ball-room must see the enamoured swain following her footsteps with reverence and with passion; the rest was nothing. When, in the praiseworthy cause of regaining a deserter, she was forced to resign a few hours to a tête-à-tête and the holding of hands, she was driven to the extremities of boredom.

It was strange that this creature who seemed made all of flame, whose eyes in a moment flashed or grew dangerously tender, whose voice knew every grade between the clear, bird-like tones of indifference and those throaty emotional notes, should be, in truth, as passionless as the sternest moralist could desire, and, had her vanity not been so monstrous, as pure. A type of woman not uncommon, yet, in the long run, more undermining to morals than the most unbridled passion; a type of woman who in matters of love is without scruple, without mercy, without one faithful quality. In vanity, ardent, insatiable, more ravenous than the cormorant.

But hers was not an easy life; hampered for money, her family in bad odor, herself as proud as Lucifer and thinking the best hardly good enough—the odds were against her. She encountered

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slights; was called upon to kow-tow to unsympathetic people; she dared never speak her own mind; was forced to weigh every word; ferret out a good match; seem bright and responsive always; listen to fools as though they were wise men, and when bored keep a pleasant face. She was versatile enough to charm the dowagers and at the same time fascinate their grandsons. One is either gaining or losing, no one ever remains stationary. It was a bitter struggle, as is every profession where competition enters. A soldier is wounded and falls out of the ranks; a woman in society may be ill, may be sad, but whether in agony or broken-hearted she must be at her post, for that very night the chance of her life may go by or the rival she fears may gain on her. Yet, handicapped as Fortunata was, she held her own among American heiresses, Italian beauties, girls far richer and prettier than she. Little by little she crept into prominence; she began to figure as a personality. A bishop would have thought her a sweet girl; a *roué*, a perverted coquette. She ranked at first as the most attractive *débutante*, then took place among the charming girls a city is proud to have strangers to meet. Next, some one discovered that she was fascinating, unique, that there was no one like her. It became the rage to say, "Ah, La Rivallo!—what a charming, what a divine creature!" Thus one morning Fortunata awoke to find herself famous.

The Princess Colibri was proud; she grew lavish, entertained; she swore that her protégée should have a ball. The shutters of the state apartments were flung wide. The vast halls saw the light;

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the suits of armor stood astonished at the sun—casqued warriors leaning on their spears, waiting, always waiting. For the first time in twenty years, since Conte Ugo Rivallo had brought home Annie Brandelsbury as his bride, the cobwebs were swept from the walls.

Fortunata came into her kingdom, as it were. She was fêted, adored, made giddy with words of love, with proposals of marriage. But, alas! her devoted admirers were mostly half-pay officers, young Italian nobles without a *lira*. She kept her head; she was cautious; she said "No!" The Princess approved her tactics. "Attenzione, bellissima!" the Princess would say, laying her finger alongside her evil old nose. "What do we come into this world for, unless to die better off than we were born?"

However much Fortunata disdained the poses and cheap wit of her eccentric relative, nevertheless her aunt's precepts accorded too well with her own ideas not to carry a certain weight. The old heathen who had forsaken her God, who cheated at cards like a sharper, who knew no charity, nor truth, nor honor, had, nevertheless, her own code of laws, her own principles, her own right and wrong. In the Colibri's mind, the nonentity, the one who failed was a criminal. She was merciless to the girl who chose an obscure love-match rather than barter herself for a round sum. Such self-indulgence was disgusting.

Fortunata dreaded love as one might dread a fever. A passion such as that of Don Luigi and the Marchesa, she thought, must be an obsession of the

heart, a slavery of the senses, something fatal, degrading. The lovers did not seem happy, yet they were constantly together. No one molested them, and Guido proved as blind as a mole. The Colibri was most obliging. She smoothed out the course of love, proverbially rough; ran her house to please the lovers; was all discretion and tact. She nourished and shielded this passion as though it were a monster that she loved and meant to make use of. The rest of the household strove to be helpful, with the exception of Billford, unconscious of the situation, Fortunata's mother busy taking pills, and Francesca, who did not count. The others with one accord distracted Guido. The very servants protected the lovers—all Italians are lenient to love. They made no secret of their relations—they were to be seen at night passing through the dim halls, walking slowly, close together, his arm about her, her long hair falling like a storm-cloud over his shoulder. Meanwhile Guido lounged down-stairs, swigging *barolo*. He was chronically drunk, sang and raved in the halls, or, more often, sat about besotted, his feet in their long-toed foreign boots resting on the table. He let his wife go her own way, while he went his. But the road to Hades is not always easy. The lovers suffered; each was the other's bane; they were suspicious, jealous, unsatisfied. They indulged in orgies of anger, as it were, in debauches of rage. In one of these perverted transports, Luigi seized Antonia by the hand and gave her wrist a wrench, calling her names unfit to be told. She fell on her knees, her hair sweeping the floor, and her cries made the Palazzo ring.

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Down-stairs some of the family gathered about the studious green lamp, exchanged knowing glances, wagged their heads, while Miss Billford wondered, and, innocent as a babe, asked Dacampagna what ailed his amiable lady.

The passion of Don Luigi and Antonia was of that ominous nature whose mark is jealousy, unfaithfulness, tumultuous anger, whose relapses to tenderness are even more ill-fated—a love incomplete, unsatisfying, yet impossible to shake off. He had at first been attracted by her beauty, by her melancholy, that so well became her. Now he found his heart more compromised than he had thought possible, and was held by her self-abandonment, her stormy tenderness and attacks of conscience. At first, he believed this remorse feigned. He was to learn, however, that Antonia pretended an emotion as little as she concealed one.

Lent came in. The air was filled with the chiming of bells, solemn processions filed through the streets. The churches rang to the *De Profundis*. Balls, dinners, festas were no more—the pious fasted. Antonia swathed herself in black, grew severe with lack of food, and pale as any phantom. She trod the halls of the Palazzo as though pacing a cloister, fingered her rosary, and passed Don Luigi with head averted.

Don Luigi, saddened by the austerity of his mistress, turned to Fortunata for diversion, but received little encouragement. His “dearest mother,” he suddenly remembered, had written from Florence, entreating him to come to her, and he took himself off, after having in vain tried to work out of his

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brother "a trifling loan, a mere nothing." Guido, who ate mostly away from home, declared that he was fasting, had given up meat for Lent. This statement was met with general incredulity, "Though, of course," admitted the Princess, "it may be true, for he is drunker than ever, which either proves that he eats less or drinks more." The Colibri, getting wind that one of her rivals, an old buffoon who, like herself, affected the eccentric and ridiculous, had a change of heart and had taken a priest into her palace for the Lenten season, was fired with emulation, and she withdrew to the convent of the Assumptione, a very austere order, to make what is called a retreat. How the godless old woman passed her time among the Sisters of the Poor none ever knew. Fortunata found herself practically alone. Nonentities such as her mother, her younger sister, and the governess did not count. Eugenio was now in England, supposedly deep in work at Oxford. The Contessina passed her time straightening out her entangled love-affairs, and trying to make out of no money at all enough to buy her summer wardrobe. The Palazzo was as sober as a cloister. Miss Case made daily incursions. Her loud, affected voice, her foreign cries of, "Fortunata, carissima, bellissima, ma chérie!" echoed falsely through the palace. She was vulgar, compared with the other bread-and-butter Misses of Rome. The girls drank tea together in the vast hall. They bragged of their invitations, confided their love-affairs, hinted at their lovers, whispered scandal, and lamented the dulness of Lent.

At last the forty days of mourning were over.

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The Colibri emerged from her retreat wearing a smug air of propriety.

At the first whisper of spring, Don Luigi forgot Florence, forgot his mother, and came post-haste to the Palazzo. In the rejuvenation of the season, Rome grew young. The hawkers found stronger voices, the women looked prettier; the flowers bloomed as though by magic. Even Guido became affable. "Fragoli, fragoli!" shouted the strawberry sellers. The women, in their spring finery, vied in color with the flowers of the Piazza di Spagna—tulips, lilies, roses, painted as it were with blood. Fortunata's friends instigated automobiling parties to Tivoli, to Frascati, to Subiaco. The Italians, with their inevitable dramatic sense, were costumed for these excursions like the chorus in a comic opera—négligé shirts, turned-down collars, flowing ties, linen checked to cause astigmatism. They gave themselves to pleasure as other nations do to drink. They liked everybody; were amused at everything; they rode on donkeys, and interchanged words of love. They lunched at newly discovered inns. In vine-covered arbors they ate *vitello*, *vermicelli*, and *risotto*; they drank the sweet wines of the country; with the pretty manners that never forsake their race, they toasted each other, exchanged flattering speeches, and in the sun they laughed like a company of fauns whose only business is to be happy. Such a nation! They have not their equal the world over for charm, for grace, for the ways that endear; they glow at a word; every humor becomes them; they make a friend with a side-glance, and take your heart with a smile.

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As the spring waned and the sun grew furious, Fortunata's mother, the Contessa, complained of more ills than Job himself. She and Francesca took train for Porto d'Ancio—the more fashionable watering-places, for lack of means, were denied them. Miss Billford accompanied them. The governess's wages were due now for over a year; no one seemed to know what was to be done about it. The Colibri declared that the Contessa must pay; the Contessa wailed her inability. "After all," observed the Princess, "one can't turn such a poor old orphan adrift."

Fortunata stayed on, to her secret satisfaction, with the Princess, Antonia, and Luigi in the stifling Roman heat.

Eugenio now came home from England. He was through, he said, with that country of snobs and vandals. Oxford had done him little good. He was the same, half-fop, half-æsthete. He took to his flowered dressing-gown again, had his hair waved, and wrote verses. Meanwhile, however fierce the days, the nights were balmy; the moon and the stars, veiled in a mist of heat, discreetly forgot to watch the earth. At night in the Palazzo gardens, the nightingales sang, breathed out a rapturous note, repeated, tender as a sigh. In the voluptuous sweetness of the night, Don Luigi and the Marchesa forgot their grievances, their jealousies. The myrtle, the laurel, the rampant plants, expanded and bred in the sun, stirred by the breath of the night, rustled in the dark.

CHAPTER VIII

ANTONIA had made Fortunata her confidante. The Marchesa saw nothing out of place in revealing to a younger sister the secrets of her love.

"I must lose him, Fortunata, I never forget it. He will marry. It is right that he should. I am prepared for it, as I am prepared for death, for old age."

"Luigi will never dream of such a thing," Fortunata assured.

"He will marry." The Marchesa held up her long forefinger. "It is as certain as death itself."

Fortunata consoled her as best she might.

On his side, Don Luigi was not silent. He thought Fortunata divine. Since she would not let him make love to her, he did the next best thing and talked to her about love.

One afternoon Fortunata sat in the garden in the shade of a cypress-tree. She had a book in her lap, a cigarette in her hand, and felt kindly to all the world. Luigi sauntered past in his pearl-gray suit fitted in at the waist. She watched him awhile, amused by his swagger. He felt her eyes upon him. She said nothing, and he came and sat down on the ground beside her. He took off his hat, his hair was in tight curls with the heat; with a silk scarf he wiped his brow; a fragrance of tuberose was wafted through the air.

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"Antonia's perfume," he said, waving the handkerchief before Fortunata's nose.

They sat side by side, more or less silent, enjoying the shade. His mustache was brushed up, almost into his eyes. There was something virile, feline about him that suggested a panther. Fortunata yawned; after a pause she said:

"Antonia was calling you awhile ago."

"Aye! Antonia!" He made a gesture with his hand as though throwing a quoit. "What madness, what folly, Fortunata! Yesterday Antonia said to me, 'Luigi, let us go away together, to America, to Australia—non lo so. I stand before Guido this way—'" He dropped his head forward, imitating the Marchesa. "'Antonia,' I told her, 'you are mad!' And she cried, she cried!"

Sincerely, without any wish to be funny, he imitated a woman weeping. "Santo Spirito, can such things be? While a wife is with her husband, it is all very well; but when she leaves him, who then speaks kindly of her, where is her character? Like this"—he held out his palms, blew on them, then spread his fingers—"it is gone forever!"

"Gone forever!" corroborated Fortunata. She was far too much of an Italian to see anything unusual in the discussion.

"And besides," continued Don Luigi, with the simplicity that cropped out in him at times, "I should not like it. It would cause me much discomfort. Guido would find me out, challenge me. He is a good shot, *che diavolo!* I am never afraid, but life is dear, Contessina. Antonia and I must creep off, like robbers in the night. I don't steal

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a man's wife, per Dio! and carry her away from him. Then, how should we live? Guido, only, has money. Aye, Madonna, is such a thing possible?"

"Quite impossible," agreed Fortunata.

He turned violently toward her. "You angel!" he cried, seizing both her hands. "Talk with Antonia, Fortunata. Show her it cannot be. Tell her it is madness—absolute insanity."

"I will tell her."

"Ah, thank you, thank you!" He kissed her hands rapidly, first one, then the other, with a fervor that suggested something more than gratitude.

From her grandfather, perhaps, the business American, Fortunata had inherited method, a sense of the value of time, and courage for work. In a padlocked tin cake-box she kept systematically ticketed all the love-letters she had ever received. There were packets as thick as a volume; others, single letters from anonymous admirers, sent after the Italian fashion. There were trinkets, original poems, pressed flowers, and tokens innumerable. She treasured these, not because they were dear to her or evoked tender remembrances, but as proofs of her ability. She sorted and labelled them as a public man might sort his newspaper clippings. She kept a list of her admirers, of the men she flirted and danced with; another of such as had proposed; and a third of those who she thought really loved her. The first and the second categories filled pages, the third was shorter. Among the names was that of a young Italian, the Marchese Guasconti, popular then in Rome. He was a gentleman, good-

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looking and agreeable, though deplorably poor. His poverty, one might have thought, would have saved him from Fortunata's wiles, yet she gave him no rest until he was in love with her, so desperately in love that he followed her about in asinine fashion, in the sight of all Rome. He proposed to her repeatedly. She replied in an indefinite way, after the manner of women of her type. Her answers meant "I can't marry you, but keep on making love to me. Be a sentimental old bachelor for my sake." At last he placed her in a position where there was no avoiding the issue. If she said no, she knew she must lose him, so she made it yes, but stipulated that their engagement be kept secret. Her mother, she explained, was under the influence of her aunt, and the Princess Colibri, she declared, would never hear of her making a match that was not brilliant from a pecuniary standpoint. Guasconti agreed to silence. Missionary work in darkest Africa was not further from Fortunata's plans than was this marriage, yet her answers were almost as insanely fond as his own letters. She saw him every day, or, if too much occurred, she appointed an hour in the night, after an entertainment, for the season was now again in full swing. On the lower floor of the palace, through a barred window, Fortunata whispered to Guasconti out in the damp and dreary cold of October—a sad season that year. The dawn was unbecoming to her lover, and she feared likewise to herself. His face was cadaverous and his nose blue. Why endure such discomfort? Merely to prove that a man who had once loved her could not easily leave or forget her. Perhaps she hoped,

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incredible as it may seem, that when she broke with Guasconti, he would in some way make her famous—threaten to shoot her or commit suicide. A wise proverb says, "Beware of those who have never suffered." Fortunata had never known the pangs of love. With Guasconti she planned their wedding journey, the whereabouts of their honeymoon. She smiled upon their mutual future, yet all the while she was looking for a way of escape. Guasconti's attentions, she feared, had begun to compromise her, and to cut off other suitors. In her difficulty she turned to her aunt. The Princess and she had been wont to hunt in couples. Her Excellency undertook a little comedy, and played the part of a brutal relative, tyrannizing over a weak-willed but affectionate young girl. When, after the interview, Guasconti, looking old and shaken, came to Fortunata, she found to her surprise that she could cry. She wept upon his shoulder very piteously—natural tears, for she had been anxious as to the issue of her plan—and was nervous and overwrought. He held her in his arms and thought her broken-hearted. He comforted and soothed her. When one loves so entirely how can one doubt, how blame? And so he left her. So cleverly had she acted that he felt for her no bitterness, no disillusionment—he loved her if anything the more.

Fortunata was one of those who observe themselves as they pass through life. She would watch herself come into a room, bow, shake hands, compliment. She was aware of any defects in her manner; she noted, as might an onlooker, her sweet, spontaneous smile. And so, instead of feeling re-

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morse for the undeniable wrong she had done a man who devotedly loved her, she was occupied in watching her own attitudes while passing through so disagreeable a phase.

There had never been any one to turn Fortunata into the right way, to say, "Keep your face to the light, and remember there is more to be done in the world than to confound Cardinal Santinello and bring down your waist to eighteen inches. Your help and your love, and some of your life's blood, must be given before you come to the end of the road."

CHAPTER IX

IT was the hour of the *colazione*. The Colibri and her relatives were at lunch. All were there except Luigi and Guido, who were gone to the races. Antonia had risen from the table, and at the farther end of the room she was supervising the placing of some plants, pointing gravely with a banana.

"A letter, Eccellenza, from the Queen Mother."

Nello bowed low with the salver. The Princess took up the envelope, stamped with the royal arms—a scarlet shield bearing a white cross, right and left two lions, and hung with the purple.

"A welcome letter." Her Excellency's voice was so gentle as to startle the servant. The Princess tore open the envelope. As she read her face grew almost kind. "Fortunata, she speaks of you. She writes: 'You have, I understand, a charming niece, the Contessina Fortunata Rivallo. I hear much of her beauty, her lovely manners. I wish to know her. In our youth you and I were so often together that all those who are near to you, Prudenzia, must be dear to me.' Adorable woman!" the Princess cried, in a burst of enthusiasm, and she kissed the letter repeatedly. She read on: "Ha! she mentions your mother, Fortunata, says she remembers meeting her." The Colibri grunted. "I have heard your father tell of the interview. All through the

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presentation, it seems, Annie had the hiccoughs. Nevertheless, the Queen Mother wants to see you, Fortunata; and you, too, Eugenio—and by the Madonna, Francesca as well. Francesca, I suppose, must go. I am afraid that she must be shown.”

“Oh, the dear, sweet, gracious Queen!” Francesca was transported. “Oh, Zia! What shall I wear? My blue dress with the little, tiny polka-dots!” And the poor little soul beamed north and south in her joy.

“First,” commanded the Princess, “lift off that pompadour. It hangs down around your face like a life-preserver. You will smother under it.”

“And remember, Francesca,” murmured Miss Billford, her finger on her lip, her head held on one side, “remember, it is not the attire that makes the gentlewoman, but her conduct, elegant, yet modest. When our late Queen, the virtuous Victoria—”

The Princess rapped with her fork on the drinking glass. “Fortunata, Eugenio, the interview is for this afternoon! You will see the only good woman I have ever known, the only really good woman who is not a bore, or a hypocrite, or a fool.”

Eugenio looked toward his aunt. “I am a socialist,” he said, “or, rather, have just become one. I can have little to say to a Queen, but I will go.”

The Colibri had fallen back in her chair and, with the uncouth manners peculiar to her, was scratching her nose with the edge of the envelope, her features spread in a fatuous smile. “By-the-way, no mention is made of our dear Marchesa. How does that happen?” The old woman bent a little forward, folded her arms and stared across the room,

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intent, fierce. "Have a care, Antonia. It's no good omen when the Queen Mother forgets you. It means you're sinking, going down. It means a shrugging when your name is spoken. The Queen Mother is strict. She gave the Monte Chiaro the Collar of the Virgin for giving up her lover. Fortunata, don't I keep saying—Billford, go away, you don't understand this. Francesca, take Billford away. Don't I keep saying, Fortunata, that the first thing I know I'll have all Rome pointing the finger at me. I'll be accused of harboring immorality, of letting vice grow rampant in my house. You're so indiscreet, Antonia, so drivellingly foolish. Can't you be happy without letting the whole world know? Look at me, Antonia! Per Dio, give up digging in those flower-pots! I am speaking for your good. Sangue di Dio! It's no use helping those who won't be saved; you can't keep a pig out of a trough."

"Nello," said Antonia, dreamily, pointing to the tubs of oleander and myrtle, "in placing the plants, try to have a conception of a harmonious whole."

"Yes, Signora Marchesa."

Antonia flung out her arms in sudden despair. "Nello has no decorative genius, no idea of the beautiful, Principessa!" she cried.

At the hour appointed by the Queen Mother, Fortunata appeared and came swiftly down the stairs to where the Princess stood in the hall leaning on her cane, and blowing the smoke from her cigarette through her brutal, trumpet-shaped nose. Somehow, the mantle worn by the Contessina gave her the look of being disguised, loaned her an air

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discreet, mysterious. Next, Eugenio passed his aunt with a bow, and, finally, led by Miss Billford, Francesca appeared, washed within an inch of her life, smelling of soap, shining from it.

"Do I look nice, aunt?" she asked, rather piteously.

The Princess grasped her niece by the ear and gave it a tweak. "You are antiseptic!" shouted her Excellency, and burst into a boisterous laugh.

In the carriage Eugenio was leaning back nonchalantly, his arm passed through the window-strap, his long, delicate hand trembling to the motion of the carriage.

"Ah," he was saying, "half of the ills we suffer sprout from the throne. Down with royalty, I say! I have joined a society. They pay me great respect. I am the only aristocrat in it. I am like Shelley, Fortunata!" he cried, shaking his hair back off his forehead. "I dream of a new world where all men are equal. Italy is in a stage of transition. We are on a pilgrimage to something better. It is a sad time we live in."

For such a weary pilgrim, Conte Rivallo wore very modish boots. Meanwhile Francesca was droning: "I must curtsy once, twice, thrice; I must not interrupt; I must not contradict; I must not cross my knees."

Fortunata answered both brother and sister politely, but, in truth, she hardly heard them. She was fighting her own problems. She was deep in debt; the very cloak that enveloped her, the shoes on her feet, the hat she wore—a trophy of plumes—were all as good as stolen. She dreaded every mail.

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"Madame Rigmarole, Modiste of the Queen, entreats the Signorina Rivallo—" "From Peaux, Furrier to his Majesty: One ermine-lined mantle, one muff, and boa of sables, etc." At first mere *billets doux*, hints as to the passing of time, now regular dunning bills, commands for payment, threats. She could not hope for her income until May—an allowance of a few thousand *lire* was meagre meat for all the ravening wolves she had to feed. The future looked black to her. At moments she was tempted to shift the weight of debt, to get out of it all, to slip away with de Brillac, or with some one of the other penniless men who dared her to live with them on nothing. The prospect was not inviting. She saw herself decamping from the Continent, harassed for money, badgered by creditors, dodging the law, like her father before her.

Why doesn't some one with money ever like me? she thought. And she fell into a melancholy reverie as the carriage drew up before the gates of the palace of the Queen Mother.

As the trio drove home through the dusk, Eugenio bent forward, seized Fortunata's wrist, and exclaimed:

"Ah, my sister, I was proud this afternoon to remember that the Rivallos have been always ready to die for King or Queen or country. As I sat there and listened, and looked at her, I understood. It's glorious to have some one to give your life for. Think of us Italians for over one hundred years cutting each other's throats for an Albizzi or a Cosimo. Think of Lancaster and York! Think of the *Vieille Garde* marching into Russia to turn to

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ice. Think of men that went to hell for Mary Stuart. Isn't it fine; isn't it splendid; doesn't it make thrills go up your spine!" The young man threw back his head and flung out his arms wide.

In the court of the Palazzo Colibri the Duchessa da Monte Chiaro's roans champed their bits. In the *sala* the Princess and her crony, the Duchessa, sat jowl to jowl in the twilight, their evil old faces all but touching. They hissed scandal, venom, and cackled over the abominations each whispered to the other. At the sound of footsteps, "Fortunata! Eugenio!" cried the Colibri. Coco stretched his throat and let loose a volley of horrid oaths, while Ganymede and Mimi sprang from under the table, showing their gums. The Princess's beasts were as malicious as her Excellency herself.

"And the interview?" questioned the Duchessa da Monte Chiaro, nodding a mighty turban toward Eugenio.

"The Queen is a sweet lady," Francesca was beginning, when, with a brusque gesture, the Colibri suppressed her.

The unhappy child was never allowed to get a word in edgewise.

"You, Fortunata, tell us!" commanded her Excellency.

"What would you say, Zia," she asked, unclasping her cloak, "were I to tell you that I bring you five thousand *lire* more a year? Would you thank me? Would you lend me enough to pay my bills?"

The Princess was on her guard. "I should say it was my due. You owe me more than you can ever

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pay—a debt of gratitude. All your life—how many years is it? Well, no, we won't count—I have given you food and shelter, advice, interest, love, such as angels only feel for each other.”

“Zia,” said Fortunata, “the gracious Queen told me that after all the time you served her, it was not right that your pension should be discontinued. She begged you to accept five thousand *lire* from her a year. Frankly, Zia, I was tactful this afternoon—your good luck is due to me, and the least you can do is to lend me the money. Look at these shoes, look at these gloves, look at this coat—they are not mine; I wear them at my peril. And see, the shoes are half worn out.” And with a farewell glance that enveloped her audience, the young girl trailed off in her clinging dress.

As Fortunata mounted the stairs, her attention was caught by a line of light radiating from under Antonia's door. She concluded that the Marchesa was dressing for dinner.

“Aye chiquita!” sang Antonia, in her vibrant contralto. Her voice floated out onto the landing, repeating the melancholy love-song over and over. Fortunata knocked. The plaint ceased. “Avanti!” cried the Marchesa. Between the four candles of her bureau Antonia was seated, enveloped in a wine-colored dressing-gown. Her hair fell over her shoulders, like the cloak of the Lady Godiva. With a motion of her hand, she dismissed the servant.

“Don Luigi and my husband have not returned, Fortunata?”

“No, Antonia.”

And sitting on the window-sill, drawing back into

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the dim recesses of the curtains, the young girl began to tell of the afternoon, of its adventures, its triumphs. Curiously enough there was sympathy between these two women. Their minds were opposed; their hearts were different; yet Fortunata felt more affection for this half-sister than for any one else on earth.

"Antonia," Fortunata was saying, "as I sat there to-day, listening to the Queen, I kept thinking of all the money I owed, of all the lies I've got to tell, and the borrowing I've got to do, and the cheating, and the haggling before I get free. I kept thinking of the way we live here at home—barking at each other all the time and calling names, and I thought of something else, too; you know what I mean—I wondered if she knew. I felt ashamed. I felt almost as though I were developing a conscience."

The Marchesa had turned toward her sister, and was listening intently; her torrent of hair sweeping down on either shoulder. The noble folds of her dress set off her strange, melancholy beauty, the beauty that haunts the Grecian friezes. Fortunata's voice, young, earnest, reverberated in the sparsely furnished room. "Yes, I felt sick; I thought for the first time it must be pleasant to lead a decent life."

After a pause, "What you say is beautiful," observed the Marchesa, with the ponderous simplicity peculiar to her.

"Oh, my sister!" Fortunata cried, emboldened; "you give me the courage to ask you something I never dared before. I beg you, in the name of the Madonna, for your own good name, I beseech you

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for me, for all of us, send Luigi Dacampagna back to Florence—send him away! Since he came he has brought us only evil.”

The Marchesa gave a sort of strangling cry, and started to her feet. A trembling seized her, and she shut her eyes as though divining the presence of some hideous phantom, and opening them suddenly big and burning on Fortunata. “Ah, if you could hear what people say of you—they speak your name, Fortunata Rivallo, then they laugh. ‘That flirt!’ they say; ‘she engages herself to men she never means to marry. You may kiss her for the asking.’ For shame! For shame! And you a young girl!”

Fortunata had risen. “That is not the same thing,” she said, coldly.

“True!” cried the Marchesa; “too true! A married woman is free, while with a young girl it is different.”

“A difference there is, Antonia.” Fortunata’s heart was thumping against her ribs. “I am ashamed of nothing. Can you say the same?”

The Marchesa turned pale, as though she had been struck a mortal blow. She fell back against the window-frame, her hair enveloping her like a shawl.

“Forgive me!” cried Fortunata. “I—what is that?”

From below came the sound of a brawl, a stentorian voice shouted, “Sangue di Dio! Take this! and you take that!” and the cracking of blows.

Fortunata ran to the head of the stairs. She came face to face with Luigi, who was springing up

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the steps three at a time. At sight of her he took off his hat and made a bow—a bundle of lilacs under his arm.

“It is nothing! At the races Guido lost. He has drunk barolo. He would have fought the Duchessa da Monte Chiaro’s man but for me. Ecco!”

On hearing Luigi’s voice, Antonia sprang to him and caught him by the hand. “Do you see her?” she asked, pointing to Fortunata.

“Yes, yes!” he answered, soothingly. While supporting the Marchesa with one arm, he looked right and left for a spot to put down his burden of flowers.

“Ah, Luigi!” cried Antonia, draping her arms around his neck, “ought a young girl to nourish unkind thoughts, wicked suspicions? Should she accuse, rebuke her sister?”

Fortunata lost all patience. “A young girl can’t do this! A young girl can’t do that! My life long that’s been drummed into me. Married or not, I’m a human being!”

“I can’t conceive the reason,” declared the Colibri, who by means of Eugenio’s shoulder, the banister, and her own gouty hands, was hoisting herself up the stairs. “I can’t conceive why it is that boots figure so in intoxication. Drunken people are so obsessed with their boots. They either want to take them off or else to go to bed in them. Guido has just—”

“Ah, Principessa!” exclaimed Antonia, addressing the Colibri over Luigi’s shoulder, “ought a young girl to suspect evil, even to know what evil is?”

“Well, it depends,” the Princess answered, judiciously, “on where a young girl is brought up.”

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"Luigi!" murmured the Marchesa. Laying her palms on either side of his face, she held him at arm's-length, looking profoundly into his eyes. "Ho trovato!—she is jealous. Fortunata is jealous of such happiness as ours; the angels themselves would be envious."

"She gave me a glance, a side-glance.
And I burn, I perish like a flame,"

shouted Guido, and he was heard tumbling his way up-stairs.

The tension in the air, the atmosphere of emotional storm, the drunken voice that woke the echoes, all went to the Princess's head like wine. She wagged her cane at Fortunata.

"This is it, Antonia. Fortunata is afraid that you will mar her chances. You'll bring the name of Rivallo to shame, and she'll be penniless and obscure, and an old maid." And she proceeded to laugh in a highly uncanny fashion, flapping her arms and screeching like a crow.

CHAPTER X

“**W**HO is the nice young man, Fortunata, I sometimes get a sight of around the palace?” queried Miss Case one morning.

The girls were in Fortunata’s bedroom. The Contessina looked intently into the glass while Hortense waved her cloudy hair. She was gifted with submissive hair, silky and unusually thick. Nevertheless, in pursuit of fashion, she wreathed her head with the coronet braid, the puff, all the latest vagaries. Her toilet-table was worthy of a worn-out belle, and these wisps and strands and switches suggested the trophies of a scalping Indian.

“Narrow, pale, dressy?” asked Fortunata.

“Yes, a young fellow with lots of hair.”

“And a pointed chin? He’s my brother.”

“The Conte! Let me meet him some day, will you, Fortunata?”

“He would be delighted, I know,” said Fortunata—“a little closer to the temple, Hortense. Are you going to the Monte Chiaro’s to-night?”

“Not if I know it. It’s one of her intellectual jamborees.”

“A regular literary orgy,” admitted Fortunata. “The Colibri says to have no reserve in your mind, to go on intellectual sprees, and lay your soul bare is just as improper as any other kind of debauch—”

FORTUNATA

"The Monte Chiaro will have the place crushed full of literary lights."

"Eugenio and I will be there."

"Then you'll find me there, too," averred Miss Case.

"Genius is a terrible malady, Fortunata," said Eugenio that night, as he and his sister rolled up the via Vittorio Emanuele in the carriage of the Princess. "Ah," he continued, tragically, "I have the obsession, the unrest, all the divine disquietude!"

"Si, Caro mio. Here we are."

An oblong of light faced them, and the Monte Chiaro's majordomo was defined in its midst. The stream of guests branched off, the men to the left, the women to the right, and they shouted to each other as they shed their coats and wraps, some joking, some complimenting, others—a husband and wife generally—quarrelling, but not ungraciously. "Always late! What stupidity!" half-reproachfully, half-caressingly, after the fashion of the South.

An atmosphere of discontent prevailed among the guests; they appeared disgruntled, like children who, on coming to a party, regret being there. Indeed, it was the Monte Chiaro's night for entertaining the litterati, playwrights, and æsthetes. Obscure subjects were discussed—Hamlet, for instance, and the smile of La Gioconda. The world and art co-mingled. Society swept into the reception-hall looking self-sufficient, sleek, well-groomed, and well-fed, while the students sidled in afterward, as though conscious of their unkempt heads, their translucent faces, and of the something dowdy and pathetic which the ever restless brain gives to the body

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Miss Case was entertaining a group who followed her every word with appropriate gestures. She was speaking English, and in the voice of a graphophone. As Fortunata and Eugenio passed Pearl 'spied them, and came after with that vigor of purpose peculiar to the American.

"Hello, cutey!"

"Good - evening, Signorina. You are charming! Pearl, this is my brother."

Miss Case wrenched Eugenio's hand; he made her a deep bow expressive of melancholy, of disapprobation, and then turned away. Pearl's eyes, pale as flawed jewels, ate into his back.

"I can't understand," ventured Eugenio, in a voice of maidenly reserve, "the attraction I possess for women over six feet. Female grenadiers are drawn to me; bones and sinews adore me; and for a lantern jaw I prove irresistible." Therewith he flicked some powder off his sleeve, with a smile sarcastic yet coy.

The dawn was already in the streets, faint and chilly, but the Monte Chiaro still kept calling for recitations, for songs. By this time the audience was fallen into a state of coma; but the performers had worked themselves into a histrionic frenzy.

"Recite us something of yours, Conte!" cried the Monte Chiaro, addressing Eugenio, in her brazen, compelling voice.

He sprang to his feet, his face transfigured. Protesting, he shrugged his inability, his lack of time for composition, the undue length of his finer poems. "Aye, Madonna! Duchessa!" and he gesticulated with all the violence of the artist and of the Southerner.

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“Curfew shall not’—go it!” called Miss Case, as though leading off a cheer.

The audience seconded her, clapping limply.

The young man stood in the centre of the group. He had lost his foppish airs; his figure seemed to expand; his eyes lightened and radiated with that divine fire that can transfigure a face. He made no gestures, and spoke in a voice devoid of conscious expression.

The poem, roughly translated, was like this:

“THE SIREN

“He stood beside the waters,
The phosphorescent waters,
The waves like huge disporters
Were tumbling in the sea.
When in the starry stillness,
The moonless fragrant chillness,
The pale and slim Undine rose effulgent from the sea.
She was a merman’s daughter,
The pride of all the water,
The prettiest and wickedest that ever swam the sea.
Her hair was green as sorrel,
And her breasts were tipped with coral,
Hers was the mystic beauty of the strange malignant sea—
She put her arms around him,
And in her hair she wound him,
And her young strength enwound him,
Beside the salty sea.
The wild clouds overswept them
And the hours overslept them
And the great sun came riding out from the glorious sea.
Then siren most insidious,
False, fickle, and perfidious,
She turned her shoulder on him and sprang into the sea.
She let herself be courted
By mermen and disported

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And rode her jolly dolphins way out into the sea—
Poisonous, fatal fusion,
And her kiss was a delusion,
Wraith, spirit, and illusion,
She came not to the shore—
And such is siren's fashion
To rent and haunt by passion,
To torment beyond compassion
Sojourners on the shore"—

Eugenio ended, flinging out his arms, throwing back his head. The applause came, sudden and sharp, like a reverberation of musketry, and the young man sat down.

"I like that," said Fortunata, proud of her brother.

"E multo musicale!" murmured the guests, shaking off their lethargy, and the party broke up.

The dawn was creeping through the streets as brother and sister drove home. Eugenio kept saying, "I know I shall ultimately be famous!" Fortunata's self-confidence, on the contrary, seemed ebbing away. She was overcome with a sudden melancholy, a sense of incompetence, of fatality.

Almost imperceptibly the winter became the spring. Nature loves the South and tries to spare Italy all the rude inclemencies. In the Colibri's gardens the perfume of the lilac weighted the air. Miss Case haunted the Palazzo. She and Fortunata, arm in arm, threaded the box hedges. Warily Pearl looked out under her pompadour for Eugenio, and when they met she was all smiles, all genial hand-gripping, while he looked at her feet and turned the color of a rose.

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"He's a perfect hymn-book, that brother of yours," she announced, one evening. "Will you see me to the door, Conte?" she begged, with a languishing look.

"He has a sore throat, Pearl," said Fortunata, "and can't stand a draught."

"I'll lend him my marabout," laughed Miss Case; and she took off her boa and lassoed Eugenio.

He came back looking very weak and sad.

"My poor brother, she'll marry you yet!" cried Fortunata. "I see it in her eyes!"

Eugenio looked toward the glass. "'What a woman wants,' you know."

"Come, you mustn't give way like this—I will help you."

Fortunata always kept her word.

It was an afternoon in April; Miss Case had come to tea. The table was set in the garden, in the shade and fragrance of the box. The amount of food offered was discreet, after the Continental fashion—a few morsels of bread-and-butter, a bit or two of cake. The air was sweet and heavy, like incense. The church bells rang lazily in the heat. Miss Case's glance ran up and down Fortunata, took in her dress, her hair, her quaint, faunish face.

Pearl had a disconcerting pair of eyes. They met the look of others with that brutal sizing-up stare, to be caught sometimes in a person when looking at the back of an enemy.

"It's hot as the deuce!" she said; and she shot a gimlet glance right and left.

She is looking for Eugenio, thought Fortunata; and the Contessina cast down her eyes and served

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the tea with an air as gentle and modest as a seraph. Doubtfully the girls smiled at each other across the table, with that antagonism always existing between the same ambition, the same pretence to beauty and wit. They fell to talking, each trying secretly to wound. Miss Case brought the conversation round where she wished it.

"There's something nice about that brother of yours," she said, in her jocose voice.

"Poor boy!" murmured Fortunata. "He has been hopelessly in love for the last few years with an English girl whom he knew at Oxford—a small, black-haired person, not pretty I should judge from her photograph. He likes that type; his taste is so poor that his attentions could flatter no one."

Miss Case was arrested. The bread-and-butter stopped half-way to her mouth.

"A little more tea, dear Pearl?" warbled Fortunata, and, lowering her voice, she bent across the table. "The Comte de Brillac was here an hour ago. He confided to me something—but you can guess what it was."

"Go ahead—tell me."

"Oh, a woman always knows," assured Fortunata, in her light, musical voice, which was, nevertheless, always a little hoarse, like a flute with a sore throat. "Guess, Pearl."

"I don't know—cross my heart."

"Ah, that divine woman!" he told me, meaning you. 'I adore her!'" And Fortunata, twirling an imaginary mustache, hand on heart, gave an imitation of the Frenchman's manner.

Pearl laughed, stimulated by amusement and vanity.

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She left without exploring the garden paths, or once asking after Eugenio. It was the old trick played on Benedict and Beatrice; but it worked at first to a miracle.

"What has, then, the Mademoiselle Case?" de Brillac questioned of Fortunata at one of the Embassies. "Her eyes pursue me like those of an ogress."

"She loves you," said Fortunata. "She told me so."

He was flattered. "She is ravishing," he admitted.

Yes, at first, it worked like a charm; but somehow the plot leaked out. In a moment of confidence did each, perhaps, tell the other, or did Pearl's instinct flare the trick? There was a quarrel, love was at an end, and from that day Miss Case turned her back on the Contessina, snorted when Fortunata was within hearing, and talked of a girl she knew who had brass enough to sink a ship.

In later years, when the Wheel of Fortune went over the Contessina, when her old sins cropped up, bills came down on her, her lies swamped her, when the world muffled its voice and talked of the "little Rivallo, poor child," the American, too, joined in and pitied. She lowered her lids over her pale, treacherous eyes.

CHAPTER XI

MEANWHILE, Luigi and Antonia went on loving and despising and making each other wretched, after the fashion of two natures as opposed as the antipodes, yet which, drawn and held by desire, mutually misunderstand, mutually torture each other. This passion was ill-fated from the first, marred by jealousy, suspicions, quarrels more degrading than the brawls of a tenement, relapses to the old delicious ways, separations, long days passed thinking of each other with a kind of aching tenderness. The Marchesa knew her lover for what he was—shallow, inconstant—and as for Luigi, he was a martyr to her moods. Monday she was more tender and melting than Juliet; Tuesday more unapproachable than Diana; Wednesday she was the faithful friend, the sympathizing sister; Thursday an ascetic, a woman dead to the world—her jealousy only was constant.

“I cannot look my husband in the eyes!” was her refrain. “I owe him everything, even to the bread I eat”—and, she might have added, even to the maintenance of her lover. “If you loved me, Luigi,” she told him, “we would go together to a country far off, where no one could ever find us again. We would live for each other.”

The prospect of ending his days amid the stern

wonders of nature, in the company of a jealous woman and nasty savages, was most distasteful to the frivolous Luigi. The Marchesa was a victim to presentiments and premonitions of ill, dreadful dreams, warnings for the future. "Unless we part," she would say, "we are lost." With great simplicity, much fervor, and many tears, she protested that her desire now was to retire to a convent, and she besought her lover to enter a monastery. The idea of Luigi in a saintly brotherhood, having suffered the tonsure, his dapper waist girt with the cord of obedience, poverty, and chastity, was sadly incongruous.

Like a sleuth-hound she tracked him. "Why did you glance at Fortunata as you did?" she would say, turning pale and beginning to tremble. He protested: "Antonia, I don't know what you mean. Davvero!" And, indeed, Luigi could no more help giving a woman a kind look than he could avoid the ripple in his hair.

At dinner the Marchesa entertained the family with a dissertation on suicide and the most efficacious mode of self-destruction, whether by water, fire, or steel. Eugenio was all for laudanum, and Fortunata for chloral. "The surest is rat-poison," yelled the Princess; "and take some yourself, Antonia."

In a fit of jealousy Antonia had sent Luigi away, and for many a day he was absent from Rome. That night the Marchesa did not close her eyes, and the servants said that they heard her pacing the floor, crying and praying, into the dawn. Next morning she was punctual at lunch, a rare occurrence with her—a proof that she had entered upon

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the strenuous life. She wore a severe habit of black, her hair was modestly dressed, her face-powder and the rouge of her lips had been forgotten.

Like the Magdalen, the Marchesa turned to her God. A daughter of sorrow she came to the church. But she no longer knew her former ecstasies, her raptures of faith. Before the month was over, Don Luigi was reinstated in the palace. As for Don Luigi, he had always held that one woman is worth another, provided she be young and beautiful, and love with all the strength of her senses. Yet now he found, and with a kind of terror, that other kisses were not to him the same—he was tied body and soul to this stormy, haggard siren. There were drawbacks. With Antonia love must be eternally protested. Devotion must be at high-water mark.

To Luigi, after the tempestuous Antonia, Fortunata was restful and refreshing. He thought her neatly proportioned, not only in body, but in sentiments—her gestures, her little ways attracted him. Her utter indifference, her unapologetic self-abstraction, held for him a poignant charm. Though the property of another she took no interest in him; she found him common, flighty, and a home-wrecker by profession. Nevertheless, she could not forbear to play for an audience, and would have shown off before a setting hen.

One morning, noisy with chimes and church bells, Luigi stood at his window, when among the box hedges he caught a glimpse of Fortunata's slim silhouette. Her head was averted. Luigi was seized with an obstinate desire to see her face. He left his room and met her at one of the turnings of the path.

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"Good-morning, Fortunata."

"Good-morning, Luigi."

"More charming than ever, were that possible, Signorina. You slept well?"

She thanked him, "Yes," and hoped he had done likewise.

He joined her, and for a time they walked on in silence. He had a thought:

"What a beautiful day."

She found it so, too; and to punctuate she rolled up her coffee-colored eyes.

"Santa Maria, you are lovely that way. Look up again."

Fortunata, always obliging, rolled up her eyes and then down again with entire composure.

"No, I have never seen a woman with your eyes. I have often thought so—you'll forgive me if this doesn't please you—"

For the first time during their talk she looked at him directly, though it was only a fugitive glance, and through her eyelashes.

"Will you marry me?"

He was as surprised as she, and they came to a standstill in the middle of a step. A proposal in Italy is merely a compliment—the man proves he dares a risk. Fortunata had encouraged Luigi with all her powers, and no one was more conscious than she herself of the subtle methods employed. Nevertheless, she was indignant at this transference of homage from sister to sister—this infidelity to a *liaison*, world-accepted and respected as a family tie. She did not answer. The bells' hurried clappers clanged and hammered.

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"I am sorry; I did not mean to overhear!" And from the hedge emerged a round and guilty face, none other than Francesca's. "I have been plucking flowers," cried the simple creature, and she held up four dried dandelions.

"Come over the hedge," said Fortunata, and when Francesca had scrambled through, the Contessina draped her arm about her sister's neck and turned from Luigi as from a contaminating presence.

Later Fortunata said to the perturbed Francesca:

"Sister, let me feel your head."

"But why?"

"To find out if you have the secretive bump."

"What's that?"

"The bump that keeps secrets."

"Well, feel."

"You have, you have! Most markedly! And now promise me never to breathe to a living soul what you heard this morning."

And Francesca promised, fixing on Fortunata eyes sincere, but as round and inexpressive as marbles.

CHAPTER XII

SEPTEMBER was come again, and the air was damp, funereal, inspiring a foreboding, a nostalgia for the summer and the heat. The trees of the Palazzo garden, overtaken in their summer finery, shook off their rustic splendor.

For all her suitors, for all her brilliant success, three seasons had seen the Contessina. She was twenty-two years old, no juvenile age in Italy, where girls marry young, and yet she was still the Signorina Rivallo. She counted on her marriage, she trusted to it, she built on it. It should make her influential, envied, free to spend and, in the Italian spirit, to love whom she chose. She looked far and near, still the husband answering all the requirements was nowhere to be seen. The Contessina had been brought up to believe that the object of a woman's life is to marry well. She had no other ambition. Her aim was to find a husband wealthy, well born, influential, if possible. Her taste was easily jarred. He must have no boring faults, none of the ways of the boor or of the professor. She would have liked him young, preferably handsome.

She was only twenty-two, yet at moments she felt old, fagged, disheartened. She feared to end on the matrimonial bargain-counter. As years went

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by, and Fortunata became neither a princess nor a multimillionairess, she began to fall in her aunt's esteem. Never was there such a toady to success as the Mentor. Although at a ball Fortunata was more popular than ever, yet through vanity her reputation had suffered. She was said to be quick to jilt, quicker to flirt, and at her name old ladies wagged their heads. Her style, the chaperones declared, was not what it should be. Not that they called her vulgar, loud, or fast. It was her exaggerated elegance they found fault with.

Barely of medium height and of an exaggerated slenderness, yet she had nothing of that fragility of aspect peculiar to small women. Her rounded form did not show a bone; her throat was like a small column; her bust curved out nobly; her every gesture spoke vitality; her waist was like a reed; her hips slipped down to nothingness. She was as lithe and subtle as a viper. She might have danced a saraband and rapped her blond head on the floor. The immature charm of some shy woodland creature appealed in Fortunata. The pale, light-brown hair framed a low, broad brow; the cheek-bones, somewhat marked, dwindled into a very pointed chin. The skin was of an effulgent pallor. The nose, too short, was only redeemed by an irresistible mouth full of curves and ripples, and at the corners untwisting like a bow. But it was in her eyes, in laughter sly and animal, in repose full of a slumberous fire, that lay the singular allurements of this face, although they were neither large nor beautiful. Deep-set and far apart, under straight brows, their exaggerated pupils held the blackness of night. So

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compelling was their glance, that when she lowered her lids, and her long lashes swept her cheeks, her face assumed a bare, one might almost say a naked, aspect.

Late one afternoon Fortunata, having parted with one of her admirers in the dark hall, returned to the *sala*. She was smiling to herself and pinning back a strand of hair. The room was no longer empty. Guido paced forward and back, with his falsely military air. In the dusk his waistcoat made a white blotch. He was growing stout, but after an indefinite fashion—one might say that he had a low chest, rather than that he had a stomach. Fortunata stood at the window, still with her reminiscent smile. Dacampagna turned on her.

“Your visitor seemed in no hurry to get away.”

From under the shadow of her hair she glanced at him.

“No?” A thought struck her and she threw back her head and laughed.

“Always a new dress!” he said; and under the pretence of feeling the material, he passed his hand along her sleeve. He stood close to Fortunata, looking down at her. The carnation in his button-hole brushed against her cheek. “How can you afford them?”

“Heigh-ho, I can’t!” Her voice was very young. “San Angelo is staring me in the face.” Instantly she regretted that she had spoken, and was overtaken with a sort of shame.

“If you want money, why don’t you come to me?”

“You?” With surprise she blushed in a manner that became her.

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"How much is it?" He stood straddle-legged, all importance and condescension.

She hesitated, her head averted, her short profile defined against the unshuttered window. She was tempted to modify the sum, to make a half-admission—yet why, after all, tell an unnecessary lie?

"Ten thousand, eight hundred lire!"

He whistled and drew back from her, scanning her figure. From his pocket he took a check-book, and, turning his back, sat down at the table. His arm moved as though he were writing. She continued to look out of the window and faltered like a child caught in error.

"I lie awake at night trying out of nothing to make enough to pay Cabriolet and Cazot, and all the other cormorants."

"This will make it all right." And he came to her, in his hand a slip of paper. Habitually, he was the meanest of men. Her astonishment bordered on alarm.

"Guido, you are too kind, but I couldn't—no, really, I can't!"

His brow reddened; he growled and blustered. Did she imagine he was offering her money for politeness? Perhaps she thought he was too poor to help her? What other friends did she count on?

Still she demurred. With an oath he flung down the check and tramped toward the door, muttering, "Take it or leave it!" She followed him, protesting her inability to pay him till May.

"I'm not a hard creditor." His good-humor was restored.

"You see, Guido, my allowance—"

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"Oh, we'll talk of that later."

She laughed and began to talk of the latest gossip. He had never known her so diverting. By a tacit understanding neither mentioned the ten thousand *lire*, and Fortunata waited until Dacampagna had left the room before she picked up the check. She felt that she was fingering blood money, though she could hardly have told why.

Fortunata's ideas of money were of the haziest, quite opposed to her methodical business-like clearness in all other matters. She lacked all understanding of the value of money. With her income she was so careless, so extravagant, so lavish as to be constantly in debt. During her father's disreputable lifetime the family finances had been run in the wildest way. The Conte would come home, his last *lira* gone. In the house every available *sou* had been gathered, garnered, scraped together, and finally parted with. But Fortune, who had made Rivallo her *protégé*, invariably turned to this most worthless and lucky of men—either certain stocks of the Contessa's, thought to be valueless, dribbled in a little money, or the Conte, by means of his blandishments and lovely manners, induced some friends to trust him with an inconsiderable sum. A run of luck at the gaming-table would reinstate him, and very splendid he managed to be for a week or so.

From this early example Fortunata was possessed of the idea that the deeper one is in ruin, and the huger one's debts, the nearer one's succor and the more dazzling. "The darkest hour is before the dawn" had been one of her father's favorite quota-

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tions. At his death the Conte had piously declared a belief that the Lord would provide for the widow and orphans. The orphans, indeed, were in no very great straits—their grandfather having settled a yearly allowance upon them—but the poor widow was destitute.

Check in hand, the Contessina next morning set out to put herself right with the world. She went about all day dribbling a little money here and there, just to show that she could pay—that is, if she wanted to. Before evening she had ordered a new dress and ear-rings, and an aigrette—such an aigrette! She came home to find Dacampagna in the hall on the watch for her. He was very complimentary, and from that day it seemed to her that she was never free from his vulgar gallantry, from the stare of his plebeian eyes.

September went by. Guido's familiar looks and airs of possession, his odious compliments, his intimate hand-shakes, his sly thrusts in the ribs to point out this or that, underwent a change. Fortunata got black scowls from him, gloomy, brooding stares, ending with an ominous flushing of the face. He let fall several times hints, and these the most indelicate, on the dishonesty of not discharging debts, of receiving a price and giving no payment in return. Fortunata was at her wits' end. There was no prospect of money coming her way for months. She avoided him and affected a cold, haughty manner, an unwise policy, as after events proved. He waylaid her in the halls with muttered discontent, stopped her on the stairs with words half-brutal, half-admiring. He dogged her in the

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streets, to theatres, to balls. His eyes ferreted her out and would not give her up. She grew sick of watching out for him, of scurrying away at his approach, of listening to his step at home and dodging as it neared—of feeling at heart a debtor, a guilty creature.

One afternoon Dacampagna came in drunker than ever, and staggering up to Fortunata's room, roared out for a sight of her. He battered at her door with his fists, his feet, until finally she was forced to thrust out her pretty head. She had washed her hair, and her brow was still enswathed in a towel. At sight of her Guido hiccupped out that she was more beautiful by all the saints than the portrait down-stairs of Beatrice Cenci in a turban.

Next day at lunch a glance at Dacampagna did not reassure Fortunata, who had spent much feverish thought on her present dilemma. He was in his pink coat, having come in from hunting; his eyes smouldered. He followed her every gesture with a look at once covetous and jeering.

Kind, garrulous Miss Billford declaimed on the prodigious progress Francesca had made in the French language. "My pupil, Excellency," declared the governess, solemnly, "is acquainted with that delightful, though infantile, fiction *Les Malheurs de Sophie*—literally translated, the *Mishaps or Misadventures of Sophia*."

"She reads more than that," the Princess opined. "Francesca has reached that age when her literature is kept under the mattress—Willie, Guy de Maupassant, Octave Mirbeau. I am ready to wager that that mattress is as lumpy as a camel."

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"I assure you, no, Princess," intervened Fortunata.

Francesca burst into a flood of tears. "No one loves me! My father is dead! I am half an orphan!" sobbed she.

"Half an orphan, true!" ruminated the Princess, grown pensive. "One might almost say wholly. Your mother is moribund. I wouldn't stake a false lira on her life. But why do you weep? As for me, that my parents are long dead I am deeply grateful. Were they still living what an age would be theirs! What decrepitude, what annoyance mine, what expense! Besides, an orphan's condition is not unusual. At this table we all are as good as orphans. Are you not an orphan, Billford?"

"Alas, Excellency, when I was but a child—"

"Exactly; so I had imagined." And the Princess lighted a cigarette, inflating her cheeks like a masque of the North Wind in a fury. "Not one little puff, Billford? Singular, when you know in your heart you long to smoke a hookah?" With a back-scraping of their chairs, the ladies rose, while the gentlemen sat over their wine. Guido forestalled Luigi and opened the door.

As Fortunata passed him last, he crammed into her hand something sharp-edged, that proved to be a note. "After lunch be in the sala," she read. "This sort of thing has been going on long enough. I have a right to speak with you—more right than most people, and I will. I'll stand no more of this treatment. Do you think I'm a dog?"

Her taste was offended. She was for disregarding the letter. Yet, thought she, the day of reckoning

must come; better face him out now. Into the *sala*, then, obediently she went. She racked her brain for an ingenious, a plausible excuse. She had so grown to dread her creditor that the sight of his riding-cap thrown on the divan made her feel sick. She had not been three minutes to herself when in swaggered Dacampagna, slapping his riding-boots with his crop. Coming close up to her, he threw his whip down on the table, and crossing his arms, looked her up and down.

"I have had enough of this!" he cried, quoting his letter.

"By this, what do you mean?" she asked, fencing.

"Che diavolo! you understand me well enough!"

"Marchese," she cried, very pale, "you shall use no such language to me!"

Guido was a coward. "Well, you've treated me so badly, so badly, davvero!" he expostulated. "A man loses patience in the end."

"If you mean I have not paid you what I owe you," she replied, haughtily, "your patience, Marchese, shall not be strained much longer. Reassure yourself, any day I expect—"

"The money may go to the deuce. I'll never feel the want of a few beggarly lire. Keep them—you're welcome to them. No, no, Fortunata, what cuts me is your stand-off manner, your don't-touch-me airs. Why, you won't speak to me any more; you treat me like a cur. Sangué di Dio! it isn't fair." And he advanced upon her with the reddening of the brow she had grown to dread. "You shall ask my pardon. Yes, you shall. You cruel, tantalizing, lovely little witch!"

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He was so near that she could feel his breath upon her face. She could draw away no farther, having backed against the tapestry.

"Upon my sacred honor, I'm bewitched!" he said, in a maudlin voice. "You've fascinated me, you little devil! I shut my eyes, and your face jumps up in the darkness. I'm insane about you!"

"It's not fair, Guido, as things are, to talk to me this way. Let me by, Guido!" she pleaded.

"First kiss and make up."

"Guido, let me by!"

"First kiss!" And he put his thick arms about her.

"You're mad!" she cried, turning her face rapidly from side to side.

"I am mad—you're to blame."

She was cold and sick with fury. She stretched her hand to one side and caught from the table the riding-crop.

He was deathly afraid of any weapon, and he released her as though she were a live coal.

In the mean time Miss Billford and Francesca had gone back to their studies. The governess combined history and geography in one lesson. Francesca and her instructress were proceeding on an imaginary trip through Germany at present, and were come as far as Cologne. Looking over her glasses, the governess let her imagination run riot, depicting the martyrdom and death of the eleven thousand virgins. The Princess, who was passing, stopped to listen, leaning on her cane, a cigarette in her mouth.

"To think, dear aunt," said Francesca, who was

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still agog, "to think of all those nice virgins buried under the cathedral!"

"How many virgins?" from her Excellency.

"Eleven thousand, poor, dear things!"

"Pshaw!" said the Princess. "I don't believe there ever were so many."

At this moment in came Fortunata all of a tremble.

"Miss Billford, can you give me a minute? Will you excuse us, Zia?"

The young girl caught the governess by the hand and led her into the embrasure of the window. "You can help me. Will you do so?"

"My little Fortunata!" cried the kind old lady.

"I owe ten thousand, eight hundred lire. Yes, I know, it's a great deal. Have you it? Will you lend it to me?"

"Ten thousand lire! I have more than that." Billford was all of a flutter, overjoyed to be thought useful. "I am happy to be of service"—the voice grew shy—"to my favorite pupil."

"Thank you! Thank you!" Fortunata seized the governess's hand, and with the pretty manners of the South, kissed it. She could go to Dacampagna now and hand him back his money. That very evening she gave him the check. Her polite smile put Guido ill at ease.

CHAPTER XIII

FORTUNATA'S conscience was hardly more at ease. "I shall pay you soon, Miss Billford," she would say.

The governess avoided all thanks with old-fashioned courtesy. October, November went past, and never a *lira* came Fortunata's way. As for that brilliant match she was forever counting upon, her prospects were dwindled to two insolvent officers and a consumptive. She was in debt again to the modiste and dunned by the bootmaker. Her allowance in far-off May could not set her straight now. She had taken almost everything the governess possessed. The old lady was in straits to have her shoes mended and to buy her gloves.

One morning Fortunata passed Miss Billford listening in the hall to a dressmaker. The woman had an English *clientèle*, and visited the palace with fuddy-duddy waists and snuffy kerchiefs, to which vanities good Billford was given.

"This body," Fortunata overheard the governess say, "is quite sweet."

"Only forty lire," tempted the seller.

"Ah, well, I may not have it now. And, perhaps, after all, it isn't suitable."

Fortunata felt an ache at her heart. She went to her room and set her mind to work. I can't

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screw a *lira* out of the Colibri, she thought, and Antonia gives everything to Luigi. The Contessina was remarkable for her imitation of handwritings. The Princess's signature, an erratic scrawl, like that of a person suffering from epilepsy, could be counterfeited—why not write "Prudenzia Colibri" on a check and draw the required sum? After paying her debt, she would confess. Her aunt and she were friendly rascals, and would not fail each other. Once married she could square herself with the Princess, and then who would be any the worse? Forgery, stealing, was far from the girl's conscience. She had found the solution of the problem. Such a simple way out of all this mess. She wondered she had never thought of it before.

Two days later Fortunata, with the look of a good child, trotted into her aunt's study. She had come from outdoors. Her collar turned up to her ears; her glance demure and feminine. The Princess, a bundle of finery, bent over her writing-desk, a pen in her gouty hand. She was correcting a letter. To adjust her sight she moved the paper forward, then back, as though playing a trombone.

"Carrissima Zia," wheedled Fortunata, "I have drawn ten thousand, eight hundred lire in your name."

The Colibri let out a howl like that of a dog robbed of a bone.

"Yes, wasn't it shocking of me?" Fortunata admitted.

The feathers, poised upright on the Princess's head, trembled like the feelers of some monster insect.

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"Ten thousand, eight hundred lire! I'm ruined! I'm lost!" And she beat her breast. It resounded like a board. "What more have you come for? Here are my rings; here are my bracelets!" And she tore the jewels from her swollen hands.

"Forgive me! Be a little patient! I will pay you, on my honor!"

"Honor!" The Colibri gave a sort of screech.

"Ah, if you only knew! I was driven to it. Carillot threatened to sue me. There was a ball night after night. I had to have the clothes."

"Just like your father. Ugo could do shabby things, but he couldn't wear them." And the Princess fell to thinking, holding her jewels on her knees. Her smile was reminiscent, melancholy, the smile of the old when the past surges back. In fancy she was again with her brother, plotting to outwit him. Her thoughts were with her friends—a company of rascals, talented, jolly knaves, all dead, all gone.

Fortunata ventured to kneel closer to her aunt's foot-stool. "I am afraid that your rings may fall and be stepped on, carissima."

"Go away from here!" shrieked the Princess, simulating distrust; and she put on her jewels. "Ungrateful child!" She started in to shake, to whimper, as old women do on the stage.

"You sha'n't lose. Wait till I'm married," quoth Fortunata.

Her Excellency let off a volley of invectives. It seems she did not count on Fortunata's bridal.

"Oh, Zia, I was so tormented, the shop-people were so rude!"

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"Cheated, robbed!" wailed the Colibri, relapsing into the old woman. Wiping her eyes, she wrote a statement in Fortunata's name, admitting the forgery of a check for ten thousand, eight hundred lire, and promising to pay when circumstances would permit. "And as for interest," said the Colibri, her features spread in a crafty smile, "I'll let it go at eight per cent."

"As you please, Zia," warbled Fortunata.

"Write your name here."

The young girl caught up the pen and signed. Her cloudy hair brushed her aunt's face.

The Princess folded the paper and closed it up in an iron box. "I have lives here." Her voice was a whisper, and she added, even more softly, "Here, under my hand, human lives." Her eyes shone with the crazy love of power that possessed her.

Fortunata made for the door. In fancy she already heard Billford's shy thanks.

The Princess called after her: "I give you fair warning, Fortunata. Sign my name again and I promise you a rest cure. You shall repose in prison!"

"That's just," replied Fortunata.

"And a word of advice. Your first season you might have settled yourself comfortably. You thought, 'I'm getting prettier, I'll wait.' A fallacy. Your best years are going. Hurry! You've found it all too easy. Look out! Before you know it, you will have been young a long time. Ah, you have been wasteful. I had you better broken in than any other girl in Rome. And you must take to smoking, to drinking, to dancing, like Salome.

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Antonia's liaison drags you down. Who's to look out for you? Not your mother, tied in a true lover's knot with her intercostal neuralgia. Your chances are slipping, slipping past. Time is gaining on you. Hurry!"

The Princess beat the iron box and chanted, "Hurry! Hurry!" like an eerie incantation.

"Heavens," Fortunata declared, "how nervous you make me! Well, I don't regret one of them! Old spooks they were, all of them."

"Some were old. Widows, praise God, are made, not born," and the Princess dismissed her niece with a bow of her opulent wig. "You'll go through the woods and take up with a rotten stick in the end."

CHAPTER XIV

WAS it a cry—shrill, piercing—or the whistle of a factory? Fortunata, in the deep sleep of morning, drowsing deliciously, started into consciousness. She lay listening, the sun motes jigging over her counterpane. There it came again—a scream on the back of another. Gripped with terror, she sprang from the bed, threw on a wrapper, broke out of her room, and ran into Miss Billford.

“It’s Antonia!” cried the Contessina, dishevelled and white with sleep.

“It is the voice of our dear Marchioness, or I am much mistaken.”

Fortunata hurried on in the direction of the cries. Persistent, unashamed, the screamer stretched her throat; the Palazzo reverberated. On the landing Fortunata caught sight of Eugenio, leaning over the banister, listening. At his side a group of servants—Nello, Hortense, Fidelio, Mariana, and the others, frozen to attention. The door of the Princess’s apartments, giving on the landing, creaked open. Her Excellency thrust out her head, swathed in something white. The sausage curls that habitually hung over either ear dwarfed the size of her face. Now, all unframed, her cheeks appeared amazingly large, swollen.

“What’s all this?”

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Mariana, the cook, threw up her hands. "Ah, Signora Principessa! Ah, Eccellenza! The Signora Marchesa passes me but now on the stairs. 'I am robbed!' wails the Signora Marchesa. 'I am robbed!' And she cries like a child under the knife—aye, aye, like a child." All unconscious, Mariana wagged her head, goggling up her eyes. "The Signora Marchesa—"

"Basta! basta!" Nello interrupted. "It is impossible, Eccellenza. There have been no thieves here."

The Princess looked about her furtively, pursed up her lips, drew in her bandaged head, and shut the door.

Nello threw high his hands. "Contessina, it is certain, the poor Signora Marchesa has been looked on by evil eyes."

The other servants made the sign of the cross.

"This is superstition, my good man." Here Billford came up, short of breath, but conscientious.

"The Signor Marchese has not come back from Florence, Nello?" Fortunata questioned, for Guido was gone to see his mother, or so he said. That mother! The Dacampagna brothers could never have got along without her.

The old servant shook his head. "Contessina, no. Guardi, the Signora Marchesa walks, she walks!" And he pointed to the hall beneath.

Fortunata bent over the rail.

A figure passed below, shaking high its hands, as though holding a tambourine. It strode out of sight, emitting long-drawn cries, like an animal in pain.

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Francesca came up, and the Contessa, the latter carrying a mahogany box, filled with her moss agates, probably.

"Where is the fire?" cried Francesca.

The figure reappeared. It stood directly beneath them, inert and abruptly silent.

Fortunata said: "I shall go down to her."

Nello looked encouragement.

At the foot of the stairs Fortunata came face to face with the Marchesa. Antonia was like the ghost of some one once familiar.

"My sister, what is it?" Fortunata took her by the hands.

Antonia's face grew more recognizable. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"Maria Immacolata! You are suffering, Antonia; you are in sorrow?" It was Don Luigi's voice. He had stepped in from the street by the open door.

At sight of him Antonia let go of Fortunata. "Ah, Luigi mio, our saint has forsaken us!" She took him by the hand and led him into the *sala*, the curtain falling into place behind them.

Fortunata shrugged and came up the stairs. She shrugged a second time under the fire of questions. "It's the Sirocco," said Eugenio; "I'm nervous as a cat." And the servants disbanded. Billford, puzzled but relieved, went off with Francesca and the Contessa, who kept asking, "Is the fire out?" in the loud, hopeless voice of the deaf.

The doors closed, the echoes died away; the Palazzo, accustomed to these sudden squalls, ceased to reverberate.

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At the *colazione* Don Luigi smiled over the table, unruffled, fresh-colored, debonair. No one questioned him; the event of the morning was almost forgotten. In the Palazzo Colibri tears, cries, tantrums were the incidents of the day. The Marchese Dacampagna, however, was absent; nor did the Princess Colibri put in an appearance.

That afternoon at tea-time Fortunata was about to open the door of the Colibri's boudoir when she was startled by a touch on the shoulder, and, turning, met the scrutiny of Cardinal Santinello's full-lidded eyes. On his chest, on his splendid robes, he crossed his white, fleshy fingers. "A word, Con-tessina," he said.

"My time is yours, Eminenza."

"Signorina, I have a service to ask of you."

"Anything that I can do—"

"The Marchesa Dacampagna, your sister, stands in need of your help."

"Of my help?"

"Yes, there are certain letters of moment to her; in fact, prejudicial to her reputation, that have fallen into unscrupulous hands—to be plain, the Princess Colibri got possession of these—er—papers. She refuses to give them up, and for no good purpose, I fear. Her Excellency's dislike of my poor follower is but too well known. I am anxious—"

"No doubt. What are these letters?"

The man of God was somewhat discomfited. "Judge not, lest ye be judged. The Church's duty is to console, to strengthen and forgive. Now for an hour I have tried, by every means in my power, to bring the Princess Colibri to a more Christian

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humor. I have used arguments, persuasions, almost had I said threats, and am no better off."

"If you have failed, Eminenza, what impression can I hope to make?"

"You are too modest; you have influence with your aunt. You are her favorite, the only being she loves. Go to her, entreat her, exert your tact!"

"I will try." And Fortunata added with sincerity, "I am fond of Antonia."

"The Holy Virgin be with you!" exclaimed his Eminence. One hand he raised in the apostolic blessing; with the other he gathered about him his voluminous robes, and went rustling down the stairs. His coach, swaying like a cradle, rocked him to his sumptuous palace.

That night Fortunata dined from home. When she came back it was late. She felt her way upstairs in the dark.

As she passed her aunt's study—

"Fortunata!" cried her Excellency, in a voice harsh, imperious; and the young girl trailed in, her evening cloak slipping from her shoulders. Crushed were the blush roses on the breast of her dress.

"Yes, dear aunt?"

"Look, see here!" whispered the Princess, stroking some sheets of paper with an air of bashful joy, quite shocking in so old and hoary a sinner.

Fortunata glanced at the pages and drew a chair to the table. "I wanted to speak to you about these letters," she said. "They are Antonia's. Will you do me a favor?" She clasped her hands, pleading, with a glance gentle and shy.

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"The holy man again!" cried her Excellency. "How he fights for his favorite! The schemer! Come, admit it was his Eminence who prompted you? He knows that I can deny you nothing; that I rob myself for you like the poor pelican that tears its breast for its young." And the Princess slapped her lean chest, which resounded, even muffled as it was in a dressing-gown and dolman.

"Oh, aunt!" protested Fortunata.

"Don't 'oh, aunt' me! You owe me everything, you little cormorant. Who proved to you your talents? Who trained you? Who gave you ambition and self-assurance? Who taught you to be pretty? to walk? to talk? to charm? Your poor old aunt. I found you the leanest of the lean—mean features, more silent than a fish, and took you in hand and formed you."

"Indeed, I have not forgotten."

"Ingratitude! At the first chance you turn from me and side with your sister, who cares no more for you than for Guido's old boots."

"Princess, forgive me; but I think that you are unjust, unkind to Antonia. She does not love you; you will not let her, yet there is no one, in spite of your hardness to her, for you are cruel, who is more proud of you than she. Often and often she says to me, 'How witty—'"

"You have forgotten, Fortunata, that it was I who taught you to flatter," interrupted the grim old woman.

"Truly, Princess, you have no reason to hate her."

"Hate has no reason, no more than love. I love

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you, selfish, deceitful, thin-cheeked little girl—why? You can't tell me,—no more can I. I have, way back inside me, such a loathing, such a contempt for the getter of these"—and she shook the letters—"for your long, canting sister, with her sentiments and her hypocrisy and her silly, maudlin tears! *Per corpo di Bacco!* Antonia comes from the best blood of Italy, yet she must marry the son of a butcher, a man I wouldn't have for my lackey—let that pass, he is rich—but when, with all Rome before her, she takes for her lover his brother, another of that vulgar brood, it is unpardonable; the commonest Lothario that ever drove the Pincio in a hack, a Don Juan only fit to seduce shop-girls, a courier disguised as an officer, the hero of a cheap novel, with his cachous and his breath perfumes and his yellow gloves—if only for such execrable taste she needs to be punished."

"If Luigi is as you paint him," soothed Fortunata, "she is punished enough."

"But she is happy, *carissima*, that's what I can't forgive her! You see it in her eyes. You hear it in her voice. Look—here he says to her— No, see yourself, here, and here again! Read, look!"

Fortunata drew back, offended. She was far too self-centred to be in the least curious, and she turned proudly away.

The Princess was nettled.

"I am unfit to live with such discreet virtue!"

"Ah, *Eccellenza*, what can I say to you, how can I reach you? Is it money you hope to get from Antonia? You'll make her buy your silence? No paying speculation, I assure you. Guido is very

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mean to his wife. Do a better business, and order Dacampagna point-blank to give you whatever sum you please. You are of the fetish who can push him in society. Get him invited to the Monte Chiaro's and you'll have five hundred lire down. Princess, for once, do a big thing, a charitable thing, and give Antonia back her letters. To keep them is unworthy of you, and a revenge any one might take. Surely you have remembrances less hard of Antonia. Think of when she was little; you liked her then. She is your brother's child. Don't cause her unhappiness; no, not as you hope for heaven!"

"As for heaven," ruminated her Excellency, "from what I have seen of the world, I am inclined to think that the best company goes elsewhere."

Loyally Fortunata worked for her sister. She asked and entreated; she grew angry; she was for snatching and tearing the letters. The Colibri, with a baleful smile, gathered together the telltale pages, smoothed them fondly, and tied them with a neat bow.

"Since you won't give them up," said Fortunata, beaten, "what will you do with them?"

The Princess answered never a word; her eyes told nothing, overshadowed as they were by her brows, those bushy groves of mystery.

CHAPTER XV

“TRY this fleur-de-lis, Fortunata,” said Eugenio, holding out a perfume-sprayer. “And come see the dainty thing Aunt Colibri is entertaining.”

It was the following morning. The brother and sister were in the upper hall; Eugenio took Fortunata by the hand and led her to an arch that gave on the *sala*. There was to be seen the Princess, dressed prodigiously fine and talking to a very old gentleman in a perky wig and a *boutonnière* nearly as large as a cabbage.

“Why, Eugenio, that’s Prince Raoul de la Tour Bichelle, Knight of the Roman Empire, Grandee of Spain, something or other of Austria, and I don’t know what else besides!”

Indeed, it was no other than that same tripping old beau in a buff waistcoat whom the Princess had pointed out to her niece at the Ritz, when Fortunata was just grown a young lady, as long ago as four years.

The Prince was perched in a chair, listening intently, his head cocked on one side, like a fatuous robin.

“Heavens, isn’t he queer!” whispered Fortunata. “Don’t laugh, Eugenio. He’ll be your brother-in-law yet. He’s the best match in Europe, the Colibri says, and I’m ready to wager she’ll frighten him into marrying me.”

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"I give you joy," said the Conte Rivallo, sarcastically. "The venerable gentleman was a follower, or so I have been told, of our aunt's, somewhere in the early fifties."

"Oh, Eugenio," reproved Fortunata, "how can you rake up those horrid old scandals!"

"Who was that droll old gentleman," asked Miss Billford, at lunch, "with the—ahem—artificial hair?"

"A husband for Fortunata, d. v.," replied the Princess.

"Amen!" cried the Contessina, devoutly.

Antonia gave a cry. "If I know Fortunata, never! never!"

"True," admitted the Princess, "he's a slippery old bird and difficult to snare. When I first knew him—I don't want to count the years—there was a pale little soubrette who could have charmed the heart out of him—these old dotards go back and love what was."

"For shame, Princess!" cried Antonia. "You have a young girl in your charge, and you give her over to a man whose evil life is the talk of Europe."

Fortunata had pushed her chair back from the table. She was grown thoughtful. She held one of the spaniels in her lap, and smoothed the dog's head. Her eyes, seeming all pupil, looked into space, with a glance abstracted and wistful.

"I am twenty-two," she said to her sister, "and when a girl gets that age, her life's a problem. Marry, and what a tying up! Don't, and you're a dreary old maid. What's to be done? I'm poor; I'm in debt. After all, one must live, one must

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dress." She caressed the dog, smiling sadly. A seraphim, lately come into heaven, never seemed more unsophisticated.

"A touch of rouge, to-night, Fortunata," the Princess whispered, with an insidious leer. "Just a suspicion. Your hair not too severely dressed. A hint of Bohemianism, of *déshabillé*, of the abandonment such as you know so well how to affect."

"Who is coming?" asked Fortunata.

The Princess lowered her eyes. "A poor old gentleman, very old, very decrepit, a friend of your aunt's, *carissima mia*."

At the appointed dinner-hour Fortunata came through the dark halls, her silky dress whispering about her ankles. In the *sala* the family were assembled.

"My niece, Fortunata, the Prince de la Tour Bichelle," cried the Colibri, in the strident notes of a showman. The old gentleman tripped up to the Contessina with all the coquetry of a ballet-dancer in disguise.

"Delighted!" he murmured, inclining a wig so firmly fixed that it seemed it must have been born with him. "This, then, is the illustrious young girl," he began in pedantic French; "one might say the Rose of Rome—?"

The Princess would not let him continue. "I was telling you, Raoul, how Faustina Monte Chiaro, when she was a young girl, mind you, before she was married, was Faulcoln de Morne's mistress. You knew him? He was ambassador here. I met Faustina one morning where the Caffè Aragno is now, in the Corso Umberto Primo. She looked down her nose

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and breathed hard. 'People have been saying I have had twins,' said she. 'Of course, you don't believe it?' 'Faustina,' I answered, 'the world is proverbially malignant; I make a point to believe only half what I hear.'"

Dinner was announced, together with a request from Miss Billford to be excused on account of a headache. Whenever guests dined at the Palazzo, the governess, who was the soul of delicacy and feared to intrude, was sure to be indisposed.

"Come, give me your arm, Raoul," commanded her Excellency, and leaning on the Prince, she dragged herself through the corridors, cursing her rheumatism. The rest of the party followed, their voices reverberating in the dim, draughty halls. In contrast, the dining-room blazed with light and breathed with heat. Along the tapestried walls sprouted gigantic silver candelabra in the form of arms brandishing sconces. In the vast apartment the table gleamed like a strip of snow. Nello and the younger servant, Fidelio, were drawing back the chairs.

"Take my right, Raoul," commanded her Excellency. "Guido isn't here to-night?" she asked, pointing to the vacant seat on her left.

Antonia, standing at the farther end of the table, answered, "No, nor yesterday, nor the night before. Ah," she cried, with a sudden bitterness, "God only knows where he is!"

"No, not God, but the Devil!" snickered the Princess.

Meanwhile Fortunata, noiseless as a shadow, had taken her seat opposite the Prince. Her hair was

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caught in a Psyche knot, a cluster of tremulous curls that gave to her head the lightness and irrelevant grace to be seen in Pompeian figures. Luigi and Antonia, seated side by side at the end of the table, were deep in some discussion. The Marchesa appeared to be accusing, Don Luigi denying. They spoke in whispers.

Fortunata's mother sat opposite. She shivered in a shabby cashmere shawl that in itself caused an air of poverty, of sadness.

The Prince was a painstaking talker; his phrases were pompous; his form of speech complimentary and laborious. He turned toward Annie, chewing over a remark, but the Princess cut him short.

For the last few minutes her Excellency had been eying Fidelio, the new servant in the Palazzo, with a glance of ferocious interest. All at once she pointed to him. "Madre de Dio!" she yelled, rearing back her brutal head, "is it the son of a woman? His legs, Madonna! His legs! They form an X. One seems to say, 'I will pass this time, if you will pass the next.' Look at him! Madre de Dio! Look!"

The diners, with one accord, turned and fixed their eyes on the unhappy servant; platter in hand, Fidelio blushed, the figure of discomfiture. Even the Marchesa brought to bear upon him her intense, tragic gaze.

As the man left the room, "Santa Madonna!" Eugenio cried. "This generation are monsters, deformities. The ancients, the Greeks, would blush for us." He threw out his arm in appeal, his fine cambric cuff riding out from under his coat-sleeve.

Meanwhile Francesca made her tumbler squeak

by drawing her finger round and round the edge. With the lack of animation to be seen in children who are never praised or petted, she rolled her vacant blue eyes.

The eyes of the Prince de la Tour Bichelle were small and sly, like an elephant's. At intervals he cast covert glances across at Fortunata.

"Does she remind you of no one, Raoul?" questioned the Princess.

"Why, yes—" he hesitated.

"A little dancer, eh, mon ami, of the Variétés, who was so supple you could have pulled her through a ring?"

The old man did not answer. He continued to watch the young girl with an expression reminiscent and melancholy. Perhaps he was trying to disentangle the memories evoked by Fortunata's face.

"Ah, don't you catch it now, in the curve of the cheek? I saw that woman only once, yet she is constantly recalled to me. See, as Fortunata looks down." And the harridan pointed to her niece, who went on dining, daintily, and with deliberation.

A cry burst from Antonia. She had brought Luigi to confess. She clasped her hands, and in the gesture overswept the salt-cellar. As ever, abstracted, she was about to pour the claret over it, there being some connection in her mind between salt and wine-stains.

"Mama mia! My cloth!" cried the Princess in unfeigned alarm.

Don Luigi caught the Marchesa's hand in time and set the decanter on the table, with the splendid challenging air that characterized his every action.

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The Princess rose from the table; her little dogs ran in to snuffle up the crumbs. "Raoul, mon ami, Don Luigi, Eugenio, you will all smoke in the sala."

Luigi drew back the portière, and the ladies passed out, followed by the men. Contrary to the Italian fashion, a fire roared up the chimney of the sala, the trunk of a chestnut-tree crackling in flames. Near the hearth stood a table charged with cigars and cigarettes, liqueurs and *barolo*. At a telepathic message from her aunt, Fortunata took her cigarette as usual. She had hardly spoken during dinner. Now, graceful and abstracted, she swept across the room and seated herself at the piano. She began to play. Her touch was light and indefinite. Her playing suggested a sort of flirting with the piano, the pastime of a musician. So casual was her manner that in watching her one thought, She must be wonderful when she tries! Another delusion—she was doing her best. The tresetti cards were brought out, glorious in red, gold, and black. The Colibri and Eugenio settled down to the game. On either side of the hearth Fortunata's mother and Francesca sat peering in the vacillating light, trying one to knit, the other to read.

Don Luigi and the Marchesa had passed through the room, looking each into the depth of the other's eyes—she gesticulating, accusing; he protesting in his vibrant, Southern voice. They seated themselves at the far end of the hall on a bench before the unshuttered window. Behind them, the moon glowed iridescent in a sky of purple bloom. The stars seemed to palpitate, beating together as though with a single pulse.

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Beneath Fortunata's pale hands the notes of the piano, languid, drawn out, passed into echoes. The Prince de la Tour Bichelle came across to her, drawn by that something harmonious, seductive, which she possessed. He leaned on the piano, summing her up, holding his monocle in his eye with a grimace.

"Although you don't know it, I have seen you before." She turned to him with the flushing softness that at times transfigured her expression. "It was in Paris, at the Ritz," she added, in the warm, shy voice she kept for her intimates.

"You interest me, Mademoiselle," he said, though he was more taken with her proportions than her words, and he sat down beside her.

The young girl wore a diaphanous scarf, which, falling over her shoulders, served in some degree to disguise their rounded lines. With that virginal coquetry that some women so well understand, the drapery was arranged discreetly, with a false modesty that awaked the imagination and inspired curiosity.

He began to talk. She listened to him, gravely, but not discouragingly. It is a tipsy old wretch, she thought; all the women have thrown themselves at his head. I shall show no animation, make no effort. I shall merely be tender and melting and ultra-feminine.

The Prince's speech was weighted with unwieldy words, classic quotations, compliments, and jokes of a mediæval obscurity. When he was helplessly entangled, she came to his help with the air of a nurse soothing a refractory lunatic.

"Testa della Madonna! San Sacramento!" swore the Princess. The game was going against her. The

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Colibri, red-faced after dinner, congested about the jaw, looked like a hostler in a wig, while Eugenio, with his slanting shoulders and white skin threaded with veins, might have been a girl in disguise. His mother had fallen asleep; her little face, round and wrinkled like an apple, bobbed to a melancholy rhythm; her features showed a network of fine wrinkles, brought on by the anxiety and wear of little nothings. Francesca's visage opposite, as yet round and placid, a mere platter, nevertheless, gave promise of the same maturity.

In the street a strolling musician burst into song to the whining of his organ. The lovers had left their seat by the window and passed into the garden, allured by the darkness. Although it was February, one of the windows stood open, so temperate was the air.

"Ah, Signorina," the Prince was saying, "you have every weapon a woman can pray for—charm, wit, beauty; above all, youth. What does your poet say? 'Springtime—the youth of the year. Youth—the springtime of life.'"

Fortunata agreed, gently bowing her head.

With a little groan Annie opened her eyes. "I napped a moment," she said, reproachfully, "so I won't close my eyes to-night. Come, Francesca." And they passed out, mother and daughter, after having said good-night.

The Prince took the hint. "Hélas! It is the time of the adieux," he protested. He rose and struck an attitude like an old coryphée. "I came on foot. I walk away on foot. Yes, even at this hour, although I am an old man." He looked toward

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Fortunata as though hoping she might contradict him. "Princess, Mademoiselle, Conte, I have passed an evening, ah!"—in default of language, he kissed his finger-tips and vanished.

Eugenio lighted a candle and, holding it aloft, drew aside the portière. The Princess passed out, making a funny grimace.

"Fortunata is clever, but she can't do it, I bet you a hundred lire," wagered Eugenio, lighting her Excellency through the corridors.

The Princess was pensive. "I had forgotten," she admitted, "how plain my poor old friend is. He wears his moles in such unexpected places." The old clown was delighted with this sally, and shuffled through the halls, chuckling. Her shadow bounded on before her, a long feather standing erect on her brow like the horn of a unicorn.

The fire was waning, the candles had already burned out. In the glow of the embers the coffee-cups stood two and two leaning toward each other with an air of tipsy intimacy. There was a rush of skirts, a sharp cry. The half-open window giving on the garden flew back. In the embrasure something white appeared stirred by the rising wind—a phantom, blown out of the night. Fortunata was startled.

"Antonia!" she exclaimed.

The Marchesa came across the floor holding her hands to her throat, as though to keep the blood from spurting out. Accustomed as Fortunata was to Antonia's temperament, she was, nevertheless, startled.

"You are ill?" she asked, her panic gaining.

"Far worse," cried the Marchesa, and she fell into a chair, her face in her lap. She kept repeating, "It is all over—all at an end!"

Fortunata knelt down beside her. "Carissima! Sister!" she pleaded. She heard the window close, and looking up saw Luigi wandering around the room with rather an abashed air, the air of one who plays a trick that succeeds too well.

"Luigi," the young girl asked, sternly, "what have you done?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Aye, Madonna, who knows?" He rolled up his handsome eyes, half-anxious, half-proud.

Antonia, with loosened hair around her shoulders, thrust out at Luigi a long, accusing arm. "He is going to Florence! He says he will never come back!"

Fortunata was horrified. She had grown to accept this attachment as a family tie. "He could never do that!" she cried, appalled.

"I am ill, davvero!" pleaded Don Luigi, in a voice of childlike sweetness. "I wish to go to my mamma. I have a fever. Feel, Fortunata—feel my pulse!" And he came toward her with an engaging half-smile.

"Don't touch him!" cried the Marchesa. "God forgive him! I would have torn out my heart for him to eat! Ah, misericordia!" She threw her arms out before her, thrusting out her ten fingers rigid, with that vehemence of the South that is at times grotesque and yet terrible. "Luigi, you are to be married! I know it; I feel it!"

"It is true," admitted Don Luigi. "When I was

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last in Florence my mamma said to me, 'Luigi mio, it is time that you were settled and took a wife, and I have for you a young girl—ah, *che reva! che simpatica ragazza.*' 'Alas! Madre,' I told her, 'I shall never be able to get another woman out of my thoughts! She is sympathetic, beautiful as the angels, this signorina of yours, but I am thinking of another face. She sings like the siren, *Madre mia*, but I am dreaming of another voice.'"

The Marchesa rose; she had abruptly stopped weeping. Her face, quick as a child's to lose the trace of tears, radiated with a melting tenderness.

"Luigi!" she said, holding out both her hands.

He was touched—felt a sudden attack of humility, of tenderness.

He took from her the scarf she wore and kissed it with all the grace, the fervor of the South.

"I hear Guido!" whispered Fortunata.

A heavy step came stumbling through the hall.

"It is that dear brother," said Don Luigi, and he shrugged, with the nape of his neck, as it were, and, thrusting out his under lip, made his jaunty mustache ride up to his nose.

Screeching on its rings, the portière was pulled aside, and in the dim entrance Dacampagna appeared, holding on to the curtain and swaying to and fro, like a sailor clinging to the sail. He stared into the room, glassy-eyed, then advanced with exaggerated dignity.

CHAPTER XVI

FORTUNATA had persuaded the Princess, although her Excellency declared that she was bankrupt, to give a dinner and afterward have in, to recite, La Vallière, whom they had seen in Paris on the occasion of their visit several years ago. Attenuated, tall, and over-thin, the French actress stood in the middle of the room apparently unconscious and indifferent. Her narrow dress wound around her and circled about her feet in curves suggestive of a Pompeian vase. Her face was long and pale, with prominent cheek-bones; her eyes, set high in her forehead, deeply sunken, and circled about her battered and somewhat vicious face, were transfigured at moments by flashes of a strange, exotic loveliness. She lowered her lids and hid her anxious eyes, wherein was read the fear of losing beauty and the fleeting years of youth. Fortunata, listening to her recite in a vibrant voice full of sex, thought, I am not afraid of the future! A sense of power ran through her veins like fire. By her side the Prince de la Tour Bichelle dozed; on his waistcoat rode four pearls, iridescent. What pretty double earrings they would make, thought Fortunata. She cast him a look as masterful as that of Judith before she struck Holofernes. To herself she promised, he shall help me up where I must be!

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After the guests had departed and the lights were out, Eugenio sought his sister in her room.

"Will you talk with me a little?" he asked.

"Surely, brother dear."

He vaulted onto the table, and, crossing his feet, showed his elaborately worked socks and slender ankles. He lit a cigarette and winced at the smoke, like a soubrette in disguise. Had the splendid Ugo Rivallo lived to see his son mature, he might have regretted the physical degeneracy of his race. Eugenio was a head shorter than his father; narrower by the breadth of two hands; no thicker through than a shadow; already he had some obscure lung trouble; at times his cheeks were flushed as though rouged, and his eyes held an unnatural brilliancy. His potations were responsible for much of his color, though not for a certain dreary little cough. Nevertheless, the young Conte had about him a fragile elegance. He was an æsthetic fop. He decked his poor little person in fine clothes and brave colors, scented his lawn shirts, and went about smelling like Araby the Blest.

"Fortunata," he said, looking at his sister, "to-night I saw the woman who could interest me. That woman made me think."

"La Vallière?"

"Yes."

"I don't like her face at all," Fortunata declared. "She's so battered, so tawdry, so bruised under the eyes. She might be dead and dug up again."

"Possibly," admitted Eugenio. "I hardly know how her face looks. I felt her presence rather than saw her. She reminds me of some one, of something."

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She is hauntingly familiar. Before she spoke, I knew her voice. In an earlier life I must have loved her."

"But, Eugenio, she is so old. Why, that woman is thirty-five if she's a day."

"No, not old, Fortunata, only she has been young a long time. She has outgrown the bouncing crudity of youth—its ignorance, its lack of mystery. I like her eyes. They think of all they have seen, of all they have learned. They compare, they remember!"

"She is so rotten, so utterly bad."

"That to me is her greatest power. The aplomb, the splendid assurance of sin. A good conscience doesn't give half the dignity."

"But, my poor brother," said Fortunata, "La Vallière is a great courtesan, rich, fashionable, famous. She would never give a boy such as you a thought."

"Genius has no age," Eugenio declared, "and I have genius—I know it, I feel it." Rising, he took his sister's hand and kissed it. "Happy dreams, Fortunata mia, and good-night."

It was the climax of the season. Society had worked itself into a frenzy. The vanity of the women flared up in a supreme flame. Each outdid the other, and over their fine clothes their faces looked out, pinched, worn, fagged. The Duchessa da Monte Chiaro organized a ballet. The aristocrats were to dance for the poor. The Constanzi Theatre saw the nobility rehearsing every day—the young and the old—yes, and the fat, too; *débutantes* and mothers crossing in the dance, for youth is never outlived in Italy, nor the love of laughter. The Coli-

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bri, watching, nudged Mr. Hackburth. "Charity!" cried her Excellency, "how many shins are uncovered in thy name!"

At luncheon that day, "Fortunata," the Princess said, "the Monte Chiaro told me that you are to have the *pas seul*. I answered her, you deserved it. Indeed, the ladies of the ballet, apart from lack of practice, advancing years, and *avoiirdupois*, have no desire to appear as able coryphées; on the contrary, they strive to prove themselves aristocrats, in spite of the footlights, and perfect gentlewomen, even while pirouetting. Now, Fortunata is willing to show that she is agile and well made enough not to rank as a lady."

"She could take no higher rank," says Miss Billford.

"Delusion!" cried the Princess. "The sooner you get that idea out of your head, Billford, the better; for sixty years—pardon me, fifty-eight years—you have passed as a lady—have you ever found it amusing or profitable?"

The governess crossed her hands on her black bombazine skirt. "I have tried to do what I believed to be my duty, Excellency," she said.

"Duty! Pshaw! Mere hypocritical cringing to public opinion. Do I sleep any the worse, do I eat any the less because the Monte Chiaro tells old Quimpère I'm a liar?"

The afternoon of the dress rehearsal arrived. The troupe of Bacchus—Bassarid and Bacchante—whirled across the stage, and with a scream of music the dance was ended. The fauns threw themselves down and blew their pipes, the satyrs crouched, leering,

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hugging their hairy knees. The women showed less dramatic talent. The nymphs struck attitudes without conviction, rocking uncertainly in uncomfortable abandonment; the riotous music ceased, the clashing of cymbals, the hooting of horns, and the flute took up a note, repeating it over and over, melancholy, queer, thrilling. The theatre, in semi-darkness, gave out a damp and pungent odor; a few dim figures spotted the monotony of seats—Mrs. Hazard and Mr. Hackburth; Mrs. Hackburth and Gismondo; the Papal Guard; Antonia and Luigi; while the Monte Chiaro scowled over the back of the seat before her, a cigar-holder in her hand, for the old lady was an inveterate smoker of cigars as well as cigarettes. In the front *loggia*, behind the curtains, the Colibri looked on, the Prince de la Tour Bichelle at her side. His pulses went dot-and-carry-one when, at a prolonged cry of the flute, Fortunata, in a tunic of dubious modesty, a leopard skin over her shoulder, a cymbal in each hand, rushed into view as a bacchante. She stood for a moment in the centre of the stage, holding aloft the brass discs, her body rigid, her head thrown back, very pale in her tawny cloak. Half closing her eyes in a sudden abandonment, she began swaying, gliding, swinging—one moment agile as a cat, the other languorous as though about to faint. The onlookers forgot the other women, many of them more beautiful; forgot that they had ever seen her before; she was an Archaic creature, soulless, perverse, dancing her sylvan dance to a pastoral piping.

“Fortunata is a good girl,” the Princess had the hardihood to say. The Prince de la Tour Bichelle

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continued to watch the dancer, with an expression at once fatuous and sad. "And Raoul," added her Excellency, lowering her voice, "*elle est bien faite, la petite. Un corps admirable.*" The Colibri drew arabesques in the air.

"I have never seen such another woman. Yet you know I make no pretence of being young."

And Fortunata, as she clashed her cymbals, happening to look right at him, he lost his breath, growing white as a corpse.

"To be in love at my age is to be in love to the end. Ah!" cried the Prince, like one giving over all pretence, "a man of my years cannot hope to keep so beautiful a creature!"

"The figure of a siren," whispered the Princess.

"*Les yeux d'une amoureuse!*"

"Yes, but not the soul. She's as hard and cold as this"—her Excellency rapped her diamond pendant—"and as pure when nothing is to be gained. You can hope to keep her for yourself always, because, Raoul, you can give her as much of these"—the Colibri lifted up her jewelled arm—"and these"—clashing the gewgaws together—"as any man."

Back in the shadow of the box, the two old friends interchanged a leer of incredible malice and meaning.

"Brava! Brava! La Rivallo!" The audience clapped, stamped, yelled, and the bacchante, looking like Fortunata for the first time, laughed back in gratitude.

She felt victorious, immortal. Her eyes showed her courage. She drew all the men after her. They were eager to carry her cymbals, her leopard skin, to touch the white arms that had coiled about in the

dance. In the stuffy dressing-room, under the flaming gas-jet, Hortense unclasped her mistress's sandals.

"Ah," cried the maid, "it makes to pity, the state of Monsieur le Prince, so enamoured of Mademoiselle! When Mademoiselle was dancing—"

"You are too conscientious, Hortense."

"I do not comprehend, Mademoiselle—"

"My little Hortense, you earn your money well." And Fortunata gave the servant a quick, meaning look.

Skirt, coat, and hat on, and dapper as could be, Fortunata tripped into the hall, when a claw-like hand caught her arm, and a little black head rose up on the level with hers.

"A word, Mademoiselle; a moment, an instant!"

In the semi-darkness the Prince looked so small and scared that Fortunata was tempted to put her hand on his throat and say, "Marry me!"

"My time is yours, Monsieur," she murmured.

He pushed back the door of one of the *loggias*, held it open for her, then followed her in.

"You are an artiste!" he groaned, in a distracted way.

She protested.

"The others are artisans beside you, clumsy artisans! Who is like you? Not one. Mademoiselle, forgive me, if I dare—you are beautiful, you are young, I am nothing beside you—I am fifty-nine," said the poor old gentleman, who was much nearer seventy. "One sees greater differences of age every day. Everything a woman can want you shall have—bracelets for these lovely arms, a necklace for

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your throat—trust me, I can make you happy.” And he seized her hands, covering them with kisses and senile tears.

A sudden sense of sickness came over her, her fingers turned to ice.

“Marry me! Be my wife!”

She looked away from him and braced herself.

“I will marry you.” She had hardly voice enough to say the words.

He went down on his knees, in spite of dust and rheumatism.

“My adored one! My Fortunata!”

He is very unattractive, thought Fortunata, feeling faint. One of the pearls burst from his shirt.

“Ah, let it go!” cried her ecstatic lover. But Fortunata, at the vision of incomplete earrings, exclaimed:

“Never, dearest!”

Hand in hand, they knelt down, sought beneath the sofa and found the jewel.

He led her to the carriage, guided her steps, and upheld her as though she were a prey to paralysis. Outside, the air was warm and bright compared to the dark corridors of the theatre. The people, rejoicing in the pleasant hour, were flitting through the street, and the sun was sinking in a glory of red and gold. Fortunata turned to give a supreme good-bye.

The Prince exclaimed, “God bless you, my beloved!” Still he could not bring himself to let go her hand. In the clear light of the spring evening Fortunata saw but too plainly her future husband. He stood with one bespatted foot on the carriage

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step. His face wore an expression at once droll and pathetic. She was conscious of his waxen complexion and the crows' feet about his eyes. In her dreams of wealth and power, the reigning monarch had never figured. Her heart sank. She felt as though a sudden misfortune had overwhelmed her.

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD FRIDAY, the holiest of days, had come. Processions of priests filed through the streets, the seminaries of France with their blue cords, those of Germany with their red, those of Spain with their yellow, those of Bulgaria with their green, those of Austria with their orange. The monks, Capuchins, Carmelites, Franciscans, the Brothers of the Poor, went slowly through the sunlight droning their masses. Holy relics were borne through the city—bones of saints, blood of martyrs, the veil of the Virgin, the staff of the best-beloved apostle. There were crowds to the left, to the right, a sea of shifting faces, of outstretched arms.

“Maria Santa, San Giovanni, Maria Dolorosa, Santo Spirito!” The bells rang, the sun shone, the choristers sang. The boys with voices like flutes, the baritones, the bassos thundering in praise.

“Ecco, the Host!”

And the people went down with bowed heads, as at the coming of the last day. Behold, at the opening of the street, a sun upon earth, more burnished than the shield of Achilles, the Host borne in triumph by the Princes of the Church! Their stoles were of purple and orange, scarlet and shimmering green, like the scales of a sea-monster, worked in opalescent devices, many-rayed suns. On they came, walking

in a cloud of incense, like an army blazing in the sun.

In and out of St. Peter's the crowd surged, conflicting, turning back, sweeping on, an unquiet shifting mass. At five, before the vespers, a priest appeared on the balcony up among the rafters. He shook out and held aloft a cloth stained with sweat and blood—said to be the cloth wherein St. Veronica wiped the face of Christ. Next, behold the spear that pierced His side, and a piece of the cross on which He suffered. Amid the vast aisles silence brooded, then all at once a sigh went up from the adoring multitude.

St. John Lateran is the modish church of Rome. On Good Friday it is more crowded than the Grand Hotel. Society flocks thither to parade the Easter fashions, to spy every one upon his neighbor, to make love. It serves as a Roman Longchamps—an occasion to frivol, to wear fine clothes, to choose a new lover, or a new mistress.

Fortunata was there in a dress fitting like a glove, and on her finger a monster ruby, de la Tour Bichelle's engagement ring. Proud of her figure, she passed amid the pillars of porphyry and alabaster; she moved among the forests of lapis-lazuli, undulating like a self-conscious snake. She had her usual following—de Brillac, Quesconti, Monte Varchi Gismonde, and two or three officers who always walked in her steps. As for her tiresome old *fiancé*, he never left her side. She made her way to the high altar, and stood watching the celebration of the mass. The young men gathered around her, cutting out the poor Prince, whispering, cajoling,

each apparently unconscious of the others, like a swarm of bees around the same flower. The chalice lilies gave out a heavy fragrance. The incense was oppressively sweet. Two lovers passed. In Italy the love of man for woman predominates over every occasion, over every situation. Don Luigi sauntered up, a voluptuous orchid drooping in his button-hole.

"Ah, Contessina, comm' è bella!" And he joined her group with a swagger semi-blustering, semi-sentimental. "Ah, Prince," he cried, "che bella festa, che belle donne! La Vallière is here," he added to de Brillac. "A dream!" He kissed his fingers, murmuring, "Ah, what a figure!"—and he waved his hat, indicating curves and s's—"the loveliest woman here after the Contessina."

The organ growled, it roared, it let out its big voice. The aisles echoed, the beams reverberated; and thundering, the music ceased, leaving the church vibrating. A priest took up the Jeremiads, the plaintive trills, the nasal melancholy chords—on and on went the chant—erie as a song of the dead, unthrilling, deprived of all the warmth of sex.

In the shady aisles boys of fifteen and sixteen swaggered, aping the ways of men. Strange little dandies with canes and monocles ogling the women. At a sudden wail of the Jeremiads, La Vallière passed, all in red like the woman of the Apocalypse, her skirts brushing the tiles of the church like a scarlet meteor; and after her, her shadow, came Eugenio in black, like Hamlet, with pale face. To hear Eugenio talk, he was near to death. He ranted and spouted about the Frenchwoman in his finest style. He sickened from his sentimental malady. He had

made Fortunata the confidante of his hope and rebuffs and despair. For, unlike the Anglo-Saxon, the Continental takes a pride in analyzing and dissecting his passion.

The men about Fortunata turned for an instant to watch the famous *cantatori* pass by.

"Contessina," Don Luigi whispered, "let us go to the Christo Salvatore."

And she answered, "Va bene," and gave her tiresome old *fiancé* the slip.

The Christo Salvatore, according to the legend, is the image found by Saint Mark in the caves of the fishermen working wonders by the sea. It is endowed, says the fable, with miraculous powers; it can cure and console. On Good Friday the effigy of the Christ lies in state at the head of a steep flight of steps leading to a court back of San Giovanni's. Six tapers, thick as a man's forearm, flame around the pallid head. The figure is chiselled in wood, the face pock-marked with dents of blood and sweat. It is the work probably of one of the earliest believers. He was a poor workman, no doubt, and yet, like all incomplete efforts, this piece of wood stirs the heart gazing at it; one feels the horror of pain, the loneliness of death. It lies there, touching and awful, crowned with thorns—an effigy of the crime of the world. The poor, the destitute, the hopeless come to it up the steep stairs, step by step, walking on their knees. Fortunata stood at the head of the flight, Luigi at her side. She looked down. With bent back, groping hands, tired, aching, the worshippers climbed on. They were mostly old, and mostly women. In honor of the *festa* some

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wore their finery, others were in black, dreary livery of the poor. Here and there was seen a bright young head, brown or golden, a mother dragging up a rebellious child. Here and there a scarf, orange or scarlet, of the *contadini*, shading the eyes, or the hats of the poor—dismal little bonnets that draw tears to the eyes.

Suddenly Fortunata caught sight of Antonia's face. The Marchesa was working her way up the stairs, among the rest, on her knees. Her head was thrown back. She was pale. Her eyes were closed. Underneath her dark lashes slipped tear after tear as she struggled on among her humble sisters. On they came, these sisters of sorrow; they kissed the feet of the Saviour, His hands, and the wound in His side opened by the ungrateful spear. Devoutly they made the sign of the cross; they crossed their hands grown rough in hardship; they prayed; many of them wept, and it was evident that they believed. It is no wonder that Christ chose for His companions the humble, the destitute, that He so loved the out-cast, the lepers, the scum of this poor earth.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE spring was come. The assiduous attentions of Fortunata's elderly *fiancé* shortly became boring in the extreme, and her aim was to escape as much as possible from her tiresome companion. Indeed, the poor child had grown to dread certain ancient anecdotes and complicated histories, referring to once resplendent beauties, now no more than a handful of mouldering earth. As to the Prince's *bon mots*—those hideous *bon mots*, the treasured words of half a century—they plunged her into measureless despair. When her lover compared her to Venus, or floundered in some reference to herself and the nine muses, she helped him through his compliment with the air of a trained nurse upholding a swooning patient. Interminable were the luncheons at which the Prince was regularly present. Having presented his *fiancée* with roses—red roses for love—he would kiss her hand and lead her to the table with as much care as though she were made of the finest cracked porcelain. The Princess was silent, with a roving eye toward a possible quarrel. The Prince was garrulous, ate much, chewed long, made himself wearisome generally, save to Miss Billford, who was led to talk of the British beauties. Eugenio brooded, while Antonia, deep in her love-affair, gazed across the cold meat

out of the window. Fortunata removed her astral body, but was brought back to earth by the Prince, who leered at her through his wine-glass. What an old satyr! she thought, as she inclined her head in graceful recognition, while her eyes took on a dreamy and tender expression.

From a sense of self-preservation, the Contessina, on principle, rarely looked at her future husband. However, as they turned home after interminable hours together in the garden, she would cast him a glance through her eyelashes. At the glimpse of his quizzical face, shrivelled and parchment-like, the impossibility of this marriage swept over her. She entered the house brooding on the means of breaking her odious engagement.

Fortunata was fighting through one of those phases, known to all, of a measureless fatigue, when everything gives way beneath one, when the world holds nothing that can beckon or allure. What inveterate perseverance merely to wash, dress, feed this carcass! What energy and pluck to battle through these wasting trivialities! Often did she laugh to keep from crying.

Antonia, in the rôle of elder sister, was striving to save Fortunata from "this miserable sale," as she termed the marriage. "A life without love is like a lyre without strings," she declared, tragically, rising from dinner with a banana-skin hanging to her fan-chain, at the close of a discussion with the Princess in which her Excellency had maintained that age in an unloved husband should be reckoned as a distinct quality, since the older he is the sooner will he be well under ground.

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"A life without love?" retorted the Princess. "I do not follow you. Why should the existence of an old and homely husband, an undying Methuselah, if you will, restrict our poor Fortunata to the part of a Griselda? Even a woman after your own heart, Antonia, might—"

"Princess, when the Just Judge shall ask you what you have done with the young life entrusted to your care, I tremble for your answer. It can be but a guilty blush."

"Look to yourself, chaste Susanna—is yours so immaculate a record, are there no questions you fear?"

"Whatever my shortcomings may be, I thank God—"

"Hallelujah; but don't bring sacred things into the discussion."

"No, for they mean nothing to you. Addio!"

It was a Thursday, the night of Lord Bolton's weekly dinner-dance. Fortunata, shaking hands with her hostess, felt a stranger's eyes upon her, and turning met the look of a tall young man—prodigiously tall he was—and big and blond.

"Lord Trevers, the Signorina Rivallo," said Lady Bolton. "Our cousin, Fortunata, and the new military attaché."

The man bowed to Fortunata, looking at her gravely.

She smiled at him and, having spoken to her hostess, turned away, giving him not a thought. Later, she remembered that she had known no presentiment on seeing him, had felt no presage of what he afterward must mean to her.

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At dinner Fortunata found herself between two bores—one of them her *fiancé*; opposite sat Lord Trevers, straighter than a soldier on parade. He was telling the lady next to him how his terrier killed rats. He spoke without gestures, though with a certain ponderous animation. It was to an old Jezebel he was talking, the wife of the French Minister, rouged to a hectic flush and barer over the chest than a plucked chicken. She did not want to speak of rats, and seemed highly discomfited.

He is not very intelligent, thought Fortunata, gazing into her soup; nevertheless, momentarily, out of the corner of her eye, she watched the clean, arrogant, well-fed Englishman.

"He is rather good-looking," she said to Pearl, as the two girls after dinner were prinking in the dressing-room.

Miss Case had taken off her curls and was combing them vigorously. "He has the goods, too," she answered, pinning on her *coiffure*. "He is the best match in Rome now. Ah, my dear, you spoiled your game when you got tied up with grandpa."

And now from every source Fortunata learned that Lord Trevers was wealthy and of the best blood in England. Gossip said that he wanted an English wife. Lady Bolton offered both her daughters. Miss Case, rumor said, was attentive to him. He himself had not yet seen the girl or woman he could love.

Fortunata found him attractive, drawn to him as her type is by the primitive, simple, stupid man. As for Lord Trevers, he never looked her way, and his unconcern gave him value. In Lady Bolton

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was no guile. Her efforts to marry off her daughters were as shameless as her false front—a thing so palpable that you blushed to look at it. She handed Lord Trevers her children alternately. It was “Richard, won’t you and Millicent try this mazourka?” “Dick, I should like to see Violet and you waltz together.” He seemed a tractable giant, and led his cousins out to dance, stepping on their feet and looking very solemn. He is an ass! thought Fortunata, and yet, somehow, she liked him.

The carriages were called. Fortunata said good-night to Lord and Lady Bolton, to their daughters, and to Lord Trevers. He looked at her coldly, or, rather, passed her as though she were not. She was chilled, accustomed to the Italian glance, that lights up before any woman, however plain or old.

I will make him love me, thought Fortunata.

She had flung her cloak over her shoulders, and, stepping from the dressing-room as he passed through the hall, she came his way. He bowed and turned aside. She bowed and stopped. They stood looking at each other—the tall young man, his eye-glass in his eye; the girl in her long cloak.

“Lord Trevers,” said Fortunata, “you were speaking to-night of wanting to make up a club for boating on the Tiber? I know the people you would like, the most congenial. I should like to help you; may I do so?”

Surprised by something in her voice, he looked at her and concluded that really he could not have seen her before. He was startled by her face. Perhaps she wasn’t pretty, exactly, but, poor girl, she was an Italian. He remembered to have heard of

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her neglected childhood, of her drunken father, of a mother that no one ever saw. Poor child! If she had any sensibility she must have suffered.

All the time Fortunata was looking at him, pale and grave. No, there was no getting away from it, she had very taking eyes.

"You are most kind, Signorina," he answered, and he added, with a slight stammer, "it would t-t-take time."

"Yes," she answered, seriously; "if you have a moment, Lord Trevers, to-morrow, come to the Palazzo Colibri to tea. We can talk it over."

He bowed and saw her to the carriage. She thanked him and shook hands. She was utterly changed. Her intimates would not have known her. The something teasing and inviting that characterized her manner with men was gone. Lord Trevers did not approve of the tone she took with her admirers. He saw no reason why a young girl born to Fortunata's position should descend to the allurements of a courtesan.

Next day the garden of the Palazzo Colibri was as fragrant as Eden with the box and cypress and persistence of the sun. The Princess Colibri was in her arbor that overlooked the city. She was in scarlet and yellow, like a great ugly tulip. Miss Billford sat on the steps of the summer-house embroidering a crest on one of the dogs' blankets, while Fortunata lay on the grass holding a leaf between her lips like a faun, her well-brushed hair glowing in the sun.

"Is Raoul coming?" asked her Excellency.

"Oh, I suppose so," answered the young girl, yawning.

"He's a frail old thing," observed the Princess. "Now, I'm a heavy woman, and when he offers me his arm to help me down the stairs, his hand is like a little dead bird's claw. I fear he'll come to pieces, I do assure you, I'm so nervous."

"It seems to me, Excellency," murmured Miss Billford, "if I may say so, that for a gentleman of more than mature age the Prince is well preserved and has very fine teeth, and a sweet smile, I am sure."

"Oh, pshaw!" cried the Princess; "they're all false except one in the front, and that's gold."

"Oh, aunt, really!" protested Fortunata, yawning, stretching like a cat.

"Fortunata is after other pearls—the one he wears in his waistcoat—hee! hee!" And in a paroxysm of joy the Princess nudged Billford, who dropped her embroidery, confounded by embarrassment and bewilderment.

It was still warm, the air resonant. The sound of feet approached, crushing the gravel, and, ushered in by Nello, the Prince Raoul's page appeared. He was a dapper little boy covered with braids, with buttons and gilt. He stood in the sunlight gleaming and bowing.

"Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle presents his compliments to her Excellency, the Princess Colibri, and to the Contessina Rivallo. He begs the Contessina to accept these flowers and his regrets that the Contessina has left Rome for the day." The boy laid a floral pyramid at Fortunata's feet, and backed with Nello behind the thick hedge of intergrowing box.

"You are leaving Rome for the day, Fortunata?"

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"I have left already, Zia," the young girl said, lifting up her flowers.

"Whom are you expecting?" asked her Excellency. "Is it wise to tell, above all to write, such an unnecessary lie?"

"Some things are easier to do than to explain," Fortunata observed, choosing some blush roses to wear at her girdle.

"Well, of course," the Princess whispered, with meaning, "if this one is worth more than the old one—besides, I think you've earned a holiday." And she worked her eyebrows up and down, looking under her scarlet hood like Mephistopheles.

Meanwhile Billford, a prey to mystification, was searching in the gravel for her needle.

CHAPTER XIX

ON the twenty-ninth of May, the anniversary of Ugo Rivallo's death, his widow was wont to go on a pilgrimage to his grave.

It would appear that a fatality hung over Fortunata's mother, preventing her ever going on any expedition, hampering her whenever she strove to leave the Palazzo even for the shortest drive. Long before the given time for the departure, she would begin to dress and go through her toilette with the melancholy of self-dedicated sacrifice. At the last moment always she was seized with a presentiment:

"Something tells me"—either she was about to trip on her corset-lace or a hook was in imminent danger of coming off. To-day the curse was not lifted. Helping herself to the salad-dressing, she let fall on her lap a drop of oil. The Contessa pictured herself spotted like the leopard. Disconsolate, she fled to her room to uncork the benzine.

"Since mother doesn't want the carriage, I should like to drive, Zia," said Fortunata.

The Princess gave one of the smiles she kept reserved for Fortunata alone. "The victoria is yours, my little one."

It was the loveliest of afternoons. "Fragoli!" cried the strawberry-venders. The Piazza di Spagna was banked with flowers. Suddenly on the

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steps across the square Fortunata saw a tall figure, and something took her at the throat.

"Stop, Gaspare!" she cried to the coachman.

"Lord Trevers!" She bent out of the carriage. The young man turned and came to her.

He took off his hat and stood beside the carriage, bareheaded in the sunshine, thinking of something to say.

Big, handsome brute, she thought, and her heart warmed to him. "I have a suggestion for the boat club."

"Yes?" Never once did he assume the conventional smile of delighted surprise.

"Will you take a drive with me?"

"If you like," he answered, in the voice that made her feel sadly unattractive.

He stepped into the carriage and sat down by her side. He had come to tea the day before—she had asked him. She was conscious of somehow having failed to draw him to her. Other men had dropped in, suitors and ex-suitors. She had been led away to talk, to be amusing. She had been distracted from the rôle of the gentle, sweet girl which she had assumed for Lord Trevers. He distrusted her, and she knew it. He had been brought up to believe that every woman was determined to marry him. His taste was simple; he liked big, buxom women whose stride could keep time with a man's, who were built to weather all inclemencies. Fortunata was subtle, too fine, too mysterious; he could not appreciate her. Besides, he admired in a woman those sterling, old-fashioned virtues—modesty, honor, and truth. He had heard Fortu-

nata lightly named, with a shrug, with a half-smile. He told himself she could not be a very nice girl—that was the phrase he used—to contemplate even for a moment marrying a wretched *roué* sunk in age and dissipation. His heart told him, although his vocabulary could never have furnished the words, that the Signorina Rivallo was ambitious hollow, crafty, false.

Fortunata had read this from the first look in his eyes. She worked to counteract this preconceived impression. She was simple, sisterly, a genial friend. Flirtatious—never, God forbid!—somewhat grave, at moments preoccupied.

“To the Pincio, Gaspare!”

Did Lord Trevers think it strange that they should drive side by side in the face of the world? She glanced at him, but could tell nothing from his profile, somewhat stern and yet material. The move was intentional. All the Pincio would see them. His name would be linked with hers. Gossip sometimes engenders the very event it rumors. She spoke of the boat club, suggesting, listening, all attention and intelligence. He was led away to talk, reassured by her quiet manner, her sincere eyes that met his without a spark of flirtatious fire.

Up and down the Pincio they drove, among the prancing cavaliers who, proud of their buckskin breeches and patent-leather boots, exhilarated by the sense of costume, the semblance of disguise, made their horses cavort, and ogled the women. The *signore* lay back in their carriages, looking in the eyes of the men with a cool steadiness that was almost oriental.

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"I should like to buy a hat," said Fortunata. Their carriage was skirting the hill. Below them swayed the dense foliage of the Borghese Gardens. "Come with me and help me choose."

"I must not take up any more of your afternoon."

"But I want you to help me. You have taste. To Madame Cabriolet's, Gaspare. You will come? Thank you."

Richard felt a sudden confidence, almost a sense of intimacy. "I sometimes choose my mother's hats, Signorina," he told her.

At this hour the Corso was feverishly gay. Trembling, bounding over the stones, the *botti* passed at a desperate rate; the *cochieri*, flapping their reins, cried, "Aye, aye, avanti!" The trams, blatantly out of place, passed screeching on their rails. *La Tribuna!* *La Voce del Popolo!* *L'Osservatore Romano!* cried the paper-venders, ragged and brown and impudent, and all the bells were carolling to mass. Before the fashionable shops were lined up victorias, barouches, coupés. The nobility were gone in to buy; the coachmen sat on impassive in the dust, cockaded and weighted with bands of gold.

In making Lord Trevers come with her, Fortunata had an object. For the last years the doors of Madame Cabriolet's had been closed to her. The *modiste* demanded to see Fortunata's money before seeing her face again. The Contessina had an early acquaintance with debt, she had been prematurely trained to live well and spend nothing. Now, when she chose to buy, she took with her a man of undoubted wealth, who made a background for her,

gave her an air of solidity, as it were. Madame Cabriolet proved most urbane.

"A hat, Madame?" And Fortunata, standing before the glass, buried her head in the reverse scrap-baskets then the fashion. To Lord Trevers she would say: "Do you think this one is pretty?"

And he would answer, "Yes, most awfully," or "No, it's a rotter."

"What color do you like best?" she asked him.

"Blue, light pale blue," courageously he told her.

"Show me all your light-blue hats, Mademoiselle Germaine." And as she tried them on, "Keep this one for a moment, Lord Trevers," she would say.

He laid his high hat down on the table, and gravely, unconsciously took a panama or leghorn into his hands, holding it carefully, almost tenderly, as one might hold a child. And suddenly, "That is a stunner!" he cried, moved by imperative admiration.

"I like it, too," she admitted. Looking-glass in hand she turned to catch another view. She undulated with the rhythm of a dancer. "I shall take this hat. You may charge it. I have a bill here." And the Contessina looked hard at Mademoiselle Germaine.

"Parfaitement."

Richard helped Fortunata into the carriage. He was warming toward her. He felt confident, intimate, at rest. He laid the rug over her knees. "Are you comfy?" he asked.

"Thank you, I am comfortable," she answered, almost with reproach. She disapproved of these abbreviations from a big, healthy, grown-up man.

The air was soft as a caress, enveloping, enam-

oured. Every passer-by seemed hurrying to a love tryst. The men brushed past the women murmuring, "Che bella, che sympathica!" and the *signore* came driving from the Pincio, lolling back languidly, conscious of being admired, of being desired. A school of young girls went past, walking two and two, holding their heads erect with a certain virginal primness, not lacking in charm. They passed with downcast eyes that were supposed to be as yet unenlightened. She was silent as they drove home. Richard was telling her of Stock-on-Tremp, his place in Wiltshire; of his horses and dogs; his mother and sisters. In fancy Fortunata saw the village, the cottages with low-hanging eaves, thatched in straw; the glorious English park; the pew at church, panelled in oak, brass-railed, curtained with red, and, finally, a home such as one never finds in Italy—blazing fires, every comfort, yet the charm of years. She listened, her head averted; a strand of hair, a curl loosened from the rest, fluttered against her temple, tickling, caressing.

The Colibri's roans stamped into the court of the Palazzo. As they drew up before the steps the echoes reverberated.

Fortunata gave Lord Trevers her hand. She looked at him directly in the eyes. Her own, all pupil, circled like a cat's with brown and gold, astonished him; his heart gave a double knock. Suddenly she lowered her glance.

Something took him at the throat, and he forgot to speak. She drew her hand out of his. It slipped through his fingers, hardly returning their pressure. "Shall my man drive you home?"

"Oh, thanks, no!"

She sprang up the steps; the door was open; Nello stood on the threshold. Fortunata said a few quick words to him, and with a thrill of laughter she passed into the hall that showed as black as a tunnel. The old servant looked after her kindly.

Love is born in a glance, in a turn of the head. It can be caught like a contagious fever in a second. Lord Trevers was the least sensitive of men, the last to be a prey to moods. Only sad when he had a sorrow, only lonely when he was alone, yet now he was overtaken with a melancholy as inexplicable as it was abject. Somehow, he felt as though he had been deserted, as though something had been taken from him. All the afternoon he had had at his side a warm, sensible, responsive presence—a girl who seemed to trust him, to rely on him—who somehow gave the impression that she thought of him when he was not with her. Yet in a moment, at the sight of her home, her open door, he had ceased to exist for her.

"Coco!" cried a harsh yet fatuous voice, and Richard, looking up, caught sight of the Colibri's parrot, squatting on the outside of one of the lower windows. The bird was chained by the leg to the iron fretwork. Having attracted Richard's attention, Coco began to show off, waddling the length of the sill, turning in his toes with the gayety of an old buffoon.

"Pretty Polly!" cried Richard, all abstraction.

The bird stood still, and fixed Lord Trevers through and through—pierced him, held him, with a cold, ironic stare. Somehow, Dick was reminded

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of the Colibri. Coco's pupils kept contracting and expanding with a monotonous regularity. The bird's scrutiny abashed Lord Trevers, and he strode from the court. A sense of void encompassed him, the streets and buildings seemed strange.

It's a crime, he thought—one might as well sell a girl at auction. Foreign women have no show. They'd be all right, some of them, if they'd been brought up in England.

CHAPTER XX

“**B**ON soir, Mademoiselle.”

In one of the smaller rooms giving off the *sala* after dinner, Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle bowed over Fortunata's hand.

She caught the scrutiny of his wise little eyes—a look suspicious, uneasy. As night after night they sat down facing each other, on either side of a console table, the Contessina crossed her hands over the chilly marble top. A candle burned between them, its flame shooting up. It seemed to Fortunata's fancy to stretch with boredom. Antonia had offered herself as the *duenna*. Don Luigi was willing to see them through the evening. The chaperones withdrew to the farther end of the room, to their favorite bench set in a window giving on the garden. Shoulder to shoulder, they watched something broad and silvery moving low down among the trees, and knew that the moon had risen.

The Prince leaned over the table. His smile was bewitching, but not too insidious—“arch,” he called it, as became a gentleman in the company of a *jeune fille*. His voice seemed to her to come from far off. He cleared his throat. The sound was ominous, determination being scraped together. He has something disagreeable to say, she thought.

"An hour ago, Mademoiselle"—he spoke with an effort—"the Comte de Brillac told me he had seen you this afternoon on the Pincio with a young man, unchaperoned."

"Yes?"

She had risen and was standing before the hearth.

"Permit me to tell you that such conduct is not well looked on in France."

"But we are not in France."

"That is true"—a spot of red flaming in either cheek. What with the newness of his wig, the color gave him the air of a dreadful little doll. "We are in Italy; we are in Rome, where scandal breeds in a breath and grows on a nothing—a nothing." Each time he repeated the word he thrust out his chin, his lids palpitated, beating his eyeballs.

"You forget, Monsieur, I am an Italian. I have lived my life in Rome. I know all this."

"And the *convenances*, do you not count them?"

"No, not in your sense. If by *convenances* you mean the necessity of a spy always at a girl's side, the reputation that is kept by watching might as well be lost."

"This is not the conversation of a jeune fille. You are engaged, Mademoiselle, although you seem to choose to forget it. We are not among savages! We are not among Americans! A young girl is chaperoned in civilized countries. She doesn't drive out all the afternoon, who knows where, alone with a young man—no, not even if he is an Englishman!" He wagged his finger at her, jibbering like an ape.

Her æsthetic sense was shocked. Only a very

young face can stand the disfiguring violence of passion. What an object! she thought, and her glance ran up and down him, scorching him.

"Madonna mia! But you are very angry! You see, already we cannot agree. You are free, Monsieur!" She flung her arm toward the window, toward the lovers, whose silhouettes showed close together in the dim radiance of the moon.

Immediately he was afraid—the future, life, his very breath seemed leaving him. He held out his arms: "Ah! ma Fortune!" he whimpered.

"The man I marry," she said, more calmly, "must trust me."

"Mais si! Mais si!"

"Believe in me. Have no more evil thought of me than the Madonna." She made the sign of the cross, all her Italian blood astir in her.

"I promise you—I swear it! Forgive me!" he mumbled, humble, incoherent.

"Very well, for this once. I am very tired, Prince; will you excuse me? Good-night." She did not offer him her hand, but bowed, looking at him intently. She pushed aside the portière against which she was standing, stepped back, the heavy folds fell into place, and she was gone!

The Prince's eyes filled with self-pity.

"I am an imbecile!" He stared forlornly at the curtain that still trembled with her going.

"Good-night, Marquise. Good-night, Monsieur."

The chaperones gave no answer—they had forgotten him.

Against the luminous strip that marked the open window their profiles were defined, turned toward

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each other. They were silent in the thrilling ecstasy of nearness.

Fortunata saw Lord Trevers at balls, dinners, theatre-parties. He said, "How do you do," and "Good-bye." He never called, never asked her to dance; he spoke only of the weather, yet her instinct told her—a sort of second sight—that his heart was changed to her. Where she was, he came, though never directly. He talked to her through others, as it were. If he had a joke to tell, he told it to some one opposite her that she might hear. They passed on the Pincio and he bowed without a smile, but he made his horse cavort; he showed off for her, he by nature the most unconscious of men. Little by little her manner toward him changed, even though she talked of the advance of the season, the poor system of heating in Rome, the unsanitary drainage, the consolidated railroads. She grew more feminine, more personal, but whatever progress she might have made, for the moment her hands were tied. Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle was a millstone about her neck. Her aunt, she thought, had influenced her too much. The Colibri's talk of pearls, of French *châteaux*, had turned her head. The Princess could not be expected to see that old man had the face of a gargoyle. "It must be nice to have a husband one could be proud of, to walk by one's side, to show," she told herself. "A foil is all very well, but I should like to marry a man that other women would find handsome."

As the spring waned, sometimes, very rarely, Richard came to call. He sat solemn and unenterprising, his hat in one hand, his stick in the other.

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He rarely looked at Fortunata, and all he said was "Ah!" or "er," in a big voice. One afternoon he stayed until the sun went down. Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle had not come, nor Fortunata's other friends, whom Lord Trevers had grown to hate. They were on the balcony, he and she, looking out across the garden. He held out his hand to say good-bye. She shook her head and smiled.

"You must stay to dinner. The Colibri would be delighted, she likes you."

He accepted with a sense of guilt. They grew silent. A sudden gloom had overtaken him. Leaning against the balustrade she looked from under straight brows across the darkening garden. One foot was flung out behind her, the arched instep and high heel turned up almost with insolence. This evening she was dressed simply, yet her native attraction, the supple lines of her body, the grace of her attitude gave her, as always, a singular distinction. So penetrating was her physical charm, the woman spoke in her so strongly, that what she chose to wear was of little account. Her skirt hung in soft folds over exaggeratedly narrow hips. The open lacework of her blouse showed glimpses of ribbon. Through the embroidered collar glinted her young neck and shoulders. A faint fragrance emanated from her like the perfume which the sun draws from the heliotrope. A wave of tenderness submerged the unsusceptible Richard, a poignant emotion, not untouched by melancholy, born of the sweetness of the evening and the girl's troubling nearness. He drew closer, brushing her wrist as though inadvertently with his hand. She did not seem to feel

his touch, no conscious look shot into her eyes. The rapid approach of the night held her apparently enthralled.

Charming girl! thought Dick, as he walked through the court, and in fancy he heard again the careful, pretty English—the correct English of a foreigner, a voice with musical breaks. The stars were on their pilgrimage; it was a majestic night.

A week later the English Ambassador gave a ball. Lord Trevers stood in the embrasure of the window, watching, when Fortunata passed, waltzing languidly in her partner's embrace—dissatisfying sight. Trevers thought her too much denuded of her bodice, her mode of dancing significant. In his heart he had already appropriated her. He was disappointed, disillusioned, and yet she did not seem vulgar. She had nothing of that buoyant desire to excite. Indifferent, she moved among the redder, more dishevelled dancers, and in her very elegance lay the something suggestive. Dick was thoroughly annoyed. He determined to punish her and not to go near her. She passed, of his presence seemingly unconscious. Again she was near, and now, whether inadvertently or of a purpose, her glance met his. For a moment her look searched his eyes. She gave no sign of recognition. The next measure turned her slim back toward him, her narrow waist half-hidden by her partner's hand. The waltz succeeding had trills—cadences—which would have stirred St. Anthony.

"Will you dance, Contessina?" Lord Trevers sternly asked of Fortunata.

They waltzed together. Like all Britons, when

dancing, he preserved a decent melancholy. She liked his arm around her, his strength, his youth. She forgot her *fiancé*, the dreary old husk. The waltz came to an end. Lord Trevers led her to the stairs, and on the steps they sat, side by side. He stretched out his long legs, his never-ending feet. He looked away from her down into the hall. A quadrille was begun. The Italians pirouetted after their fashion. She talked in her prettiest English. He answered in monosyllables, seemingly abstracted, taciturn. She glanced at his gloomy profile, recognized his expression, triumph ran in her blood, and she said to herself: I can make him love me!

He turned and looked at her, and without prelude, "When are you to be married?" he asked.

"In June."

"In England they say that that is a lucky month. Are you superstitious?"

"No, but careful."

"Shall you live in Italy?"

"No, France."

"Will you be happy there?"

"Happy, that's a big word."

And even as she spoke, Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle passed through the hall. He wore the legion of honor and the order of the Golden Fleece, for it was an evening for full regalia. His smalls betrayed the size of the spindles to which he had the courage to trust his weight.

The two young people were silent. Richard looked into space. Fortunata leaned her forehead on the banister, the breeze made by the dancers

stirred her hair, the violins kept up an amorous wailing.

The Princess Colibri's bedroom was hung with draperies representing the discovery of the sleeping "Endymion" by Diana. In full lunar splendor, against a background of sombre forest of green and tawny brown, the long-limbed goddess, followed at a distance by her court, was seen coming lightly across the grass. The huntress held in one hand a spear, and in her steps strode a lean greyhound. She was of an effulgent whiteness, while in the dusky wood her nymphs shone like pearls.

To-night the Colibri's room, seen by the hanging-lamp, was filled with vacillating shadows. Built on the roof of the Palazzo Colibri, early in the fourteenth century, this study had served at one time for the contemplation of the stars and the drawing of horoscopes. Now a carved ceiling blotted out the sky. Still the room was of its kind distinctive, in shape octagonal, and panelled in dark wood. The furniture was of every country, every period, squat, or spindle-shanked. The tables were strewn with antiquities and depressing relics, and presented the uneasy, overburdened aspect peculiar to curiosity shops. The writing-table was a chaos of papers, books, torn letters, and bits of sealing-wax; while above, defined against the black panels, hung a cross of palest ivory, from which drooped a melancholy Christ.

The Princess sat at her desk. She was still in her full regalia of feathers, but had removed her jewels. Necklace, bracelets, and earrings lay in an inter-

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woven mass, gleaming in the lamplight. The Colibri was reading, yet it was apparent from the way in which, at the least noise, her keen but heavy-lidded eyes turned toward the door, that she was more intent on listening for a sound, a footstep. The wind screamed in the chimneys and, whistling under the Princess's door, swelled the carpet in uncanny fashion.

A light step came up the stair. "Fortunata!" called the Colibri.

The door opened, and the young girl stood smiling on the threshold.

The Princess spoke: "Come in. Close the door. Fortunata, a rich man has the privilege of being ugly, but de la Tour Bichelle abuses it."

Fortunata nodded her agreement.

"Really, he is unusually plain."

"Unusually."

"Personally, I find him most tiresome."

"So do I, most."

"Then why do you marry him?"

Fortunata was so startled as to cast up her eyes, alight with a wild innocence.

"It was never his beauty that attracted you. Suppose, then, that a man, young and handsome, with even more brilliant prospects—"

"Richard Trevers," said Fortunata, blandly.

"I like a mind that from a few words understands. My niece, break off with this antiquated bore."

"But," protested Fortunata, "now that things have gone so far, what possible reason can I give?"

"What excuse do you need, since a more acceptable match presents itself?"

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"How can I tell him that? It would be so tactless."

"Say that, now your eyes are opened, you see you do not love him; that without love no marriage is valid."

"Somehow, I hate to do it, tiresome as he is."

"Upon my word, Fortunata, I am at a loss to understand your attitude. We were born to attain, to climb, and work. Nothing is worth having that costs no pain. It's lucky for us when the pain is somebody else's. We must break many a friendship and make many a wound before we can hope to succeed."

All transforming is the perversity that can gain upon the heart. The Princess gave her rendering of the word duty, and nothing could be more impressive than her delivery. Singular are the forms that duty can be made to assume. Hardly had Fortunata listened half an hour to this harangue before she was assured that her happiness—nay, her conscience—called on her to break with her ancient *fiancé*.

CHAPTER XXI

WITH a harsh squeak the Colibri's chair grated back. She rose from the table; the others imitated her, all but Fortunata, who would not forego her coffee.

Eugenio lurched slightly as he crossed the floor.

"Two glasses of vino rosso and he can't walk straight," said the Princess, looking after him. "Ah, his poor father would have been ashamed. Ugo had the best head in Rome." And her Excellency sighed with genuine regret. "Luigi, take Antonia to walk in the garden; the air will do her good. She is as yellow as a quince. Come, Guido." And the Colibri passed out of the room leaning on Dacampagna's arm.

A window faced Fortunata; it was unshuttered, and gave her a view of the open sky. She watched the moon, shaped like a sickle, rise white as steel in the heaven. The crescent gave out a severe, chill radiance. The houses opposite showed like lumpy monsters, much behumped.

"Contessina, a visitor."

She was startled, and turned to find Nello standing by her side. She glanced at the bit of cardboard and read "Lord Trevers." Her heart skipped a beat.

"Show Lord Trevers into the sala, Nello."

"Scusi, Signorina, but her Excellency and the Signor Marchese are talking affairs. Her Excellency thought possibly the Contessina might—"

"Very well, ask Lord Trevers to come here."

She looked after Nello with a seraphic smile. She was so happy, so imbecilely happy, that she could have found it in her heart to run after the old servant and shake him by both hands.

"I am early; you haven't finished dinner."

Dick Trevers's voice boomed out of the shadows at the farther end of the vast, dim room. She turned her face toward him.

"I can't see you; come here and talk to me!" she called, laughing.

He was near her in an instant, as though he had stepped from the gobelin tapestry at her side. She looked up at him. He was regarding her with the light in his eyes she liked, his blond head defined against the dark hangings and sombre panels of oak. Gravely she smiled at him, purposely avoiding any touch of coquetry.

"Have some coffee with me," she said in her vibrant voice.

"Er—thank you, I have dined."

He had not thought to face the siren all alone. A foolish panic seized him, a something numbing and ecstatic.

"Er—the fact is, I wanted to see the Princess Colibri. She asked me to bring her some photos I took of the Matterhorn."

"What! you take photographs? You are the hardest man to understand. You are so reserved that only bit by bit one finds out your tastes."

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"You're ma-making game of me."

"No, never. Now, sit down; here is some coffee. Yes, you must; I know you like it."

He sat down, crossing his big hands on the edge of the table.

"I'd like to show the Princess—"

"The Princess is busy; you must put up with me for the moment," she greeted him. She gave him a sudden, intimate smile.

The undertow was taking hold of him again, the tide of love, of desire. He found nothing to say. He watched her, and at that moment she seemed to him the most adorable woman he had ever seen; he wondered how he could ever have thought her anything but beautiful. She was busy with the coffee; she measured out the cognac like a pretty witch preparing a love-potion. As she bent her head in the lamplight, her hair glowed like satin, and among its folds nestled her ears, pink and delicate like roses.

As she handed him his cup her hand brushed against his as if by accident.

"Show me the pictures of the Matterhorn," she said.

He obeyed, glad to do what he had come for. He took the photographs out of his pocket, spreading them on the table.

"What! were you way up there? I should never have the courage."

He took her at her word. "A woman ought to be brave," he said, gravely. "I often used to think when I was looking at you, 'She's got lots of pluck, lots of grit.' That's one of the things I liked about you."

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"One of the things you liked about me?" she repeated softly. "Why, I never imagined there was anything you liked about me. I had an idea; yes, I really did, that you disliked me."

"I did rather, at first."

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes, I should like to know."

"You were used to being flattered—yes, you know you were. You are the kind of man women flatter. Now, I am proud. I never pay a man a compliment. I want him to pay them to me."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" He spoke quite seriously. "I can give you lots."

"When I met you," she answered, her voice charged with meaning, "I had no right to have any man tell me pleasant things." She looked across into the shadow, and then suddenly said, "Somehow, for my own peace of mind, I wouldn't have dared to listen to you."

"Ah!" he answered, in deep water.

There was silence. The photographs lay before them, the tumblers half-full of wine, the nut husks and fruit. The candles had burned down; only the lamp gave out its light.

Fortunata started in again. "And so you were up there on that little white peak for days with only a guide? How lonely it must have been up among those cold mountains!"

"It was jolly cold, I can tell you."

"I sometimes think that one need not go away off among the mountains to be lonely," she ventured. After a pause: "One can stay at home sometimes for that. Don't you think so?"

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"Yes, if one doesn't like one's people," he answered, with unusual perception. "Don't you like yours?" He had the indelicacy as well as the reserve of the English. She gave a faint smile, and spread out her hands in a quick, Southern gesture.

"I am among strangers—yes, I mean it. My mother is ill—as for the Princess—well, you know her. The others have their own lives to think about. That's natural, perhaps, and yet I am making a great sacrifice for them. I don't know why I tell you all this, unless because I always think of you as a friend. Am I wrong?"

"Perhaps—but whatever I am, I think of you always."

He was losing his head. He knew it.

"Yes, I am giving up everything for them. Am I right to do it? I don't know. I want to ask you; I will do what you say. My mother is poor; Eugenio has debts; my little sister, Francesca, you know, is penniless." (Pig, she thought, to lie so!) "Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle has promised to help all these people, but it is hard for me." For the moment she was herself deceived, her eyes filled with tears. "I am very unhappy!"

"Ah, Fortunata!" he cried. The word burst from him unconsciously. She was aware of an unaccountable pleasure in hearing him speak her name. She bent toward him, looking into his eyes with a look more than friendly.

"You will tell me what to do, my friend."

His face underwent a sudden change. He took both her hands in his.

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"Your hands are hot," he said, in a low, queer voice.

"And yours," she answered. Her eyes still looked into his, as the enchanted ladies must have looked at Sir Galahad in the wood. He put his lips to her hands, then looked up into her face.

"Signorina!" The sound came from the shadows behind them. They started apart.

"Yes, Nello?" she answered, in a voice that surprised her.

"His Excellency, the Prince de la Tour Bichelle, has waited for over an hour in the sala. His Excellency supplicates the Signorina to come to him, if only for a moment."

She grew as pale as though she had heard bad news.

"Tell his Excellency I will be with him instantly."

Lord Trevers rose. "I sha'n't detain you." He was as red as she was pale.

"Don't go!" she murmured, politely.

"I must. Will you show these photographs to your aunt for me?"

"Yes."

They stood looking at each other, abashed and sad.

"Good-bye," he said, with an effort.

"A rivederci!"

He held the portière back for her to pass through, and followed her into the hall. There stood Nello with a light. Fortunata longed to strangle the old man; instead, she passed into the *sala*, looking as gentle as a nun. Lord Trevers, with an easy stride, went rapidly down the stairs.

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"Ah, my dear one! My little Fortunata! Ah, my treasure!"

De la Tour Bichelle was whispering over Fortunata's unresponsive hand.

"Let us sit down," the Contessina said.

He drew two chairs before the sculptured hearth, and down they sat, she as bored and mysterious as a sphinx, he all hunched up like an eager gnome.

Santinello and the Princess were playing at chess. Guido was standing by, trying to look as though he understood the game. The Cardinal was getting the best of it. His fingers seemed to have eyes, so knowingly they handled the chessmen.

"Yes—no—yes," Fortunata answered her *fiancé*. For once she was unable to rise to the occasion.

"I admire," he said to her, "in you that delicate, mysterious languor that so well becomes a woman—"

"Che diavolo!" The Princess was beaten, and with a backward sweep of the hand she brushed the chessmen from the board. "You must all go," she said. "I am tired."

As he kissed Fortunata's hand, "Until to-morrow, my angel," the Prince murmured. He made her Excellency a profound bow. "Where, then, is Madame la Contesse and that dear Marquise, where is she that one may press her hand?"

To the amazement of all, the Colibri burst into a loud laugh, rocking herself to and fro in an agony of grotesque mirth. The Prince, who stood before her making his adieux, was surprised, confused, at this fit of uncouth merriment.

"Yes, where has my wife been all this evening?" Guido asked.

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"The Marchesa has no doubt retired," the Cardinal interposed in his soothing, slippery voice. "To-day is the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, Don Guido, if you remember. The Marchesa is devout, too conscientious, I sometimes fear. I only hope her health may stand the stress her conscience puts upon it. You have married a woman of rare piety, Don Guido."

"Si, Eminenza," Dacampagna answered, after a pause. His face was sullen, a crafty look shot into his eyes, and he added, in an uncontrollable burst of violence, "But when a woman is too good she's not easy to live with."

The Princess had calmed down; she was mopping her eyes and giving retrospective sighs and sobs of amusement.

The Cardinal passed out of the room, his robes whispering about his ankles.

"Good-night, Princess," murmured Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle again, and with exaggerated chivalry, he added, "I throw my head at your feet."

The Colibri was bored with the diffident old gentleman, and called after his retreating figure, "I throw my feet at your head!"

"Antonia! Che diavolo, Antonia!" Guido was heard in the hall, calling up the stairs.

The Colibri went to the window that gave on the garden and drew aside the curtains. High in a black sky the moon hung as delicate and iridescent as a jewel. Fortunata heard her whisper to herself, like a witch communing with the night.

Eugenio came in still wearing his overcoat. He dragged himself limply across the floor. He went

toward the hearth, drawing off his muffler and coughing a little. Fortunata was leaning on the mantel.

"Fortunata, she hardly spoke to me to-night." And he stood staring at the fireplace.

"You are shivering," his sister said to him.

"It is cold," he answered, unconsciously holding out his hands toward the empty hearth.

"Madonna! But it's freezing for May!" agreed the Princess. "Fortunata, to-night Raoul's teeth will chatter in their glass." Her Excellency's smile almost closed her eyes. "Pleasant dreams, my children!"

The Colibri took in hand a candle, drew aside a fold of tapestry, opened a little door and passed into the turret staircase that led to her study.

Fortunata and Eugenio were left in semi-darkness listening to the Colibri's feet feeling their way, creak, creak. The steps grew muffled and passed out of hearing.

"A coarse old person, our aunt," observed Eugenio. "Isn't she grotesque?"

"Absolutely gross," admitted Fortunata.

The Contessina was not unused to engaging herself to be married and then disengaging herself. There are some habits, however, to which we cannot grow accustomed, and Fortunata passed an agitated night.

The next morning, nervous and shattered, she descended just as the Prince de la Tour Bichelle was announced. There he stood, bowing on the hearth-rug, grasping a bouquet as compact as a cauliflower, and leering like a dreadful old Bacchus. Fortunata, all in black, advanced upon her be-

trothed with a melancholy dignity which inspired the beholder with a premonition of ill.

"Do you believe in dreams?" she asked, in the voice of a sleepwalker.

"Dreams?" repeated his Excellency, nervously.

"Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle," cried Fortunata, with a wild look, letting herself fall into a chair, "I must ask you to give me back my freedom. I am unworthy of you; forgive me, but I do not love you. I was warned last night in a dream. I should be doing you an injustice, an irretrievable wrong. Profoundly I admire your talent, your wit, your culture, but I cannot be your wife."

"What is this—what is this, *ma chérie*?" cried the poor old thing, skipping forward with an agitation painful to behold.

"Here is your ring, Prince. Do not think me ungrateful. You are my dearest, dearest friend, and always shall be—that is, if you will let me call you so."

He made a pretence of taking the ring, and tried to retain her hand. "You've promised yourself to me, and I will not let you escape me!" he squeaked, with so diabolical an air that Fortunata took refuge behind a table.

"A marriage without love would be to me—"

"But I love you, I love you!" he shrieked, tripping after her. "I will give you everything, *ma mignonne*! Such jewels—sapphires, pearls, rubies, like your mouth. You shall be more *fêted*, more adored than any woman in Paris. Oh, my treasure, say that you will!" His eyes were full of rheumy tears.

"Prince," said Fortunata, with dignity from over the back of the sofa, "my conscience, my heart—"

At this moment into the room sailed the Princess, in a turban nearly as large as a life-preserver. Her Excellency was buoyed up by furbelows, ruffles, and voluminous overskirts. She held in her arms the spaniel Mimi, caressing the little beast's sleek head.

"What," demanded her Excellency, "are you playing at tag, Fortunata?"

"Princess! Princess!" whimpered the doting old man, holding out his shaking hands, one of which still grasped the gay bouquet, sheathed in filigree paper—"she won't marry me, my Fortunata won't marry me!" Actually he shed tears of senile rage and disappointment. "Princess," he pleaded, "appeal to her ambition, her pride! No queen shall be more—"

But Fortunata had already slipped through the door.

The old dodderer took out his pocket-handkerchief. "*Souvent femme varie*, but how have I offended her? Than yesterday she was never kinder—why this change, why?"

"Raoul, you are old, and tears do not become you."

"I do not comprehend you, Madame."

"You are a hideous hobgoblin!" said the Princess, and without another word she sailed past him and was gone. Monsieur de la Tour Bichelle was left alone in his dapper waistcoat and subtly shaded suit.

"She won't want this," he said, and he laid the bouquet in the waste-basket, with a wheezy little

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sigh. It seemed a pity, for the roses were the loveliest and the most fragrant that the Italian spring could create.

From her window Fortunata, watching, saw a wizened, a very old gentleman, his hat poised from habit at a glad angle, totter dismally across the pavement and hide himself in his brougham. In spite of herself, her heart ached. She had grown attached to the Prince as one might to something very old, incomprehensible, and frail—a grandparent, for instance.

It soon filtered out that the Signorina Rivallo had changed her mind once more. Some said that she could not stand the cackling dotard; others, that he had found her to be a *jeune fille* more than *originale*. The few who understood Fortunata knew she had met something better. Gossips blew in to the Palazzo Colibri; the Princess proved muter than the Sphinx. Antonia held the visitors' hands and told them, in all sincerity, that Fortunata's heart could not be bought. The visitors said, "Fortunata is a splendid girl," but they knew better. As for Fortunata's mother, she took her pills and polished her ear-trumpet much as usual—the engagement was broken, and she cried rather more than when it was first announced.

Lord Trevers, playing billiards at the club, heard the news. The balls went askew and he was beaten. Why had she not married and gone out of his life? Then he might have forgotten her, but now—Indecision, disquietude possessed him. He was afraid to decide. On the one hand was Stock-on-Tremp waiting for its mistress—an Englishwoman and of

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the English Church, a girl whose name should be as clean as she herself was young and innocent. He thought of his mother—proud, stiff, moulded to the honor and prejudices of her race. On the other hand was Fortunata! To give her up was as easy as to hold one's breath and die.

Fortunata grew disquieted. She had proved herself free to be won, yet Lord Trevers did not come impetuously forward—in fact, did not come forward at all. He appeared to avoid her, passed her hastily, bowed to her guiltily, spoke to her only when forced. Fortunata, always optimistic, thought in his manner to read confession of a fatal weakness. The Princess Colibri, as ever ungenerous and inconsistent, taunted her niece. She quoted the English proverb to the effect that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Had Fortunata sought to justify herself, she might have answered, "Who advised me to run the risk?" As it was, she merely lowered her eyelids and smiled mysteriously. The Princess was reassured, and brought to believe that her niece knew more than she told. Fortunata was mortified secretly. She had staked her all, and apparently lost. She had boasted of a conquest, and had not come off the winner. Should she, who had attracted so many useless men, let Dick Trevers, possessed of every quality ever hoped for in a husband, escape her? Things can't drag on this way, thought she. I must take a decisive step. I'll go away to Perugia. I'll take mother with me, although she bores me. I'll be gone a week, and then he'll see how he likes Rome without me.

The next day she was gone, hurrying her mother

with her. The Contessa dreaded travel, loathed change, regretted the walls that knew her pains and aches, but was carried off by her daughter's indomitable will.

On the morrow Richard was passing through the Piazza del Popolo, his head above the crowd. The sun was at its brightest, the flower-girls ran after him calling their wares; of themselves his feet took the via Vittorio Emanuele. I can't call on her now, he thought of a sudden—it would be in such beastly taste.

Then he drew himself up short.

I sha'n't go near her for another week.

He kept his word; but that week, like the week before it, was hell. He had made up his mind that within three days, on Monday, he would hear from her. She might ask him to tea to thank him for some books he had loaned her. When Wednesday came, passed, and no word from her, he was taken with a sadness disproportionate to its cause. Balls, theatres, concerts—he met her nowhere. He longed to hear her spoken of; he was forever bringing up her name; but would then turn from the subject in a panic before he could be answered. He rode the Pincio, and at every turning suffered a palpitation—it was part of his sickness to take every woman within eye-reach for her. Friday came, and found him in a fever to see her—thirsty, hungry for a look of her.

The sun was going down. In the sanguinary light the majordomo stood at the Colibri gates, looking as red as Satan.

"For the Signorina Rivallo," said Richard, handing him a card. The man smiled in commiseration.

"Eccellenze, the Signorina has gone to the North, to Perugia."

A panic, an insane fright, took hold of Dick.

"When will she be home?"

"Eccellenze, I am not informed." The majordomo was reserved. His people were of position; the world claimed them; their time was not their own.

Lord Trevers turned to go. She had left the city! He might not see her for days, for months! He might never see her again! All at once his life looked aimless, empty, without reason for being.

"Attenzione!"

A carriage sweeping around the curve at full speed all but ran him down. It was the Colibri's victoria, her great roans and clanking harness, her liveried footmen hanging on behind. The Princess's head-dress, suggestive of a feather duster, fluttered in the wind. She held a spaniel in her lap, and another in the crook of her arm; her boa blew out behind her like a fiery snake. At sight of Richard she aired her teeth and, turning, said something to the footmen. They laughed, in duty bound. The Princess cursed her servants or joked with them, as the spirit moved her. Lord Trevers moved aside for the carriage to pass, and lifted his hat without a smile. The beldame drove on, grinning through her furs like a wolf.

Yonder goes, thought Richard, the guardian, the teacher of the woman I love. A foreboding came over him, a presage of misfortune. The passion that held him, he knew, could do him no good. Through the court the Princess's voice echoed, strident, insincere, jeering her servants, teasing her dogs. She

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climbed the Palazzo steps, rapping with her cane, and passed through the gaping archway, like the evil genius of the house.

At the end of the week Fortunata was back, Richard was informed. Suddenly he discovered that he liked Rome. At the turning of a corner now he might meet happiness; but he did not go where his joy, his obsession lay. For some reason he no longer dared do so. He was cured, or so he told himself, and yet his constant thought was how and when he should first see her again. He wanted to be put to the proof, he said. Their meeting came about in this way:

Richard had stepped into the Grand Hotel to leave some cards, when he heard a voice at his side questioning the cashier—a woman's voice. At the sound of it, his heart bounded into his throat. He turned. Yes, it was she! At sight of her profile, her pointed chin and captivating nose, he realized that since he had known her his thoughts had never been free from her. He spoke her name. She turned toward him, and they began to talk—he with a slight stammer characteristic of him when moved or embarrassed; she indifferently, without a smile or any effort to please, yet looking at him the while with her singular eyes, that gave to her lightest words a secret significance. He was piqued that she seemed not to notice that he made no mention of her absence. She was calling on Mrs. Hazard, she explained, and left him with one of her adorable, sudden smiles. From her presence, from the very rustle of her dress, her charm emanated, and the old, delicious agony took hold of him again.

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It is his mother, thought Fortunata, his old harri-dan of a mother, who keeps him away from me. Lady Bolton has given her an ill account—I am frivolous, flirtatious, extravagant. I drink champagne, I smoke. I have just broken my engagement to a dissipated Frenchman, and the name of my love-affairs is legion—worst of all, I am a bigoted Catholic (most untrue). Besides, my relatives are objectionable; my mother is inadequate, my aunt an evil-tongued beldame, and my poor sister's reputation not of the best. In short, I am not the woman to make Richard happy. Unquestionably this is the state of affairs—well, it must be remedied.

With Fortunata, to think was to act. A few days later at one of Lady Bolton's dinners she set her scheme afloat. She found herself placed next to an Englishman, a man of letters and a great Shakespearian student. With her intrepid courage she plunged into literature. At dessert she heard herself, to her own surprise, gossiping about Pericles. One might have thought she was his intimate acquaintance. In spite of her fluent eloquence, she was so appreciative of her neighbor's greater knowledge, so attentive, so anxious to learn, almost pathetic, that even her hostess's basilisk glance was melted when it rested upon her.

After the men were left alone, Lady Bolton and the Contessina stood together at the farther end of the reception-room, alone, beside the family album. Fortunata opened it at haphazard. A cardboard leaf fell back, disclosing a photograph of Violet and Millicent, smiling inanely at each other across a wicker-chair.

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"How lovely!" she breathed, almost with tenderness.

"Isn't it sweet!" said Lady Bolton, in the voice of one who wept.

"I am very fond of your daughters. I love them dearly, but sometimes I fear they do not care for me."

"Quite a mistake; on the contrary, I assure you—!"

Fortunata smiled seraphically. "Ah! How happy you make me. I have few friends; at least, few of the kind I want. If it would not tire you, I should like to tell you a little of my life."

"Oh, not at all. Will you have coffee?"

"Thank you."

When they were seated, Fortunata, aware that her tight *princesse* and decided *décolleté* were not in unison with the story of misused childhood she was about to weave, set the ever-useful album on one end and hid as much as possible of her person behind it. Thus, with her bare shoulders emerging over the barricade, and the heavenly expression of her upturned eyes, she made an acceptable triplet to the Sistine cherubs.

"You must know," she began, "that my childhood was saddened by religious dissensions. You cannot have failed, Lady Bolton, to have heard of the Princess Colibri's cynicism in regard to every subject relating to the Church. My poor mother has long been ill and too enfeebled to give me support; and my father ceased, as a very young man, to be a professing Catholic. Nevertheless, I was baptized into the Church of Rome, and the Marchesa

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Dacampagna undertook my religious instruction. My sister, in spite of great nobility of heart, is, I fear, a fanatic. Yet she was unable to inspire me with her faith. Still, I continued to drift to mass with the servants, now and then. I watched these rites without understanding. How unhappy is a child brought up without having known the peace of religion, and uninstructed in what is, after all, our only consolation! I assure you, Lady Bolton, I have endured some lonely and sorrowful hours."

Till now Fortunata's narrative was not as false as might be imagined. While speaking, she was aware of a truth of which she had never before been conscious. But as she proceeded she began to embroider.

"My deepest pain was caused by the fact that in secret I was bound in reality to the Church of my mother—yet, in spite of my utter moral starvation, I was at heart, and still am, a Protestant. The other day I heard you address the meeting for the welfare of the Church of England—I was there" (will she swallow that? mused Fortunata). "You were eloquent, Lady Bolton; what you said was true, terribly true. I was greatly moved—I wept—I was never more touched."

After that the Ambassadors went to say that the little Contessina Rivallo was a sweet girl, and it was sad to see the struggles of a soul virtuous naturally, but morally starved. She even went so far as to tell Lord Trevers that in Fortunata there was much that was commendable.

The mind has a way of foreseeing and naming a date that shall prove a triumph or a failure. It was

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the night of Lady Bolton's weekly dinner-dance. Fortunata was dressing. To-night is my last chance! thought she. A panic seized her; her hands trembled. That night her partners, for the first time, found her preoccupied, unresponsive. Her smile was borrowed and did not fit her. She kept a wary watch on the clock. The unrelenting hands went round—two and three were recklessly told. She thought, He is not coming!—and the inanities she was uttering died on her lips. An undisputed and unenviable partner led her out to dance. For the first measures he waltzed unheeded, then he was appeased with the tenderest smile. Fortunata's heart warmed—she had seen two reassuring shoulders dwarfing all others. She wanted to run across to him, to say, "I knew you would come! I have been willing you to come!" And when his voice asked, "Will you dance with me?" she slipped into his arms as though made for them. Her desire to be loved, she thought, must emanate from her touch, take possession of him, and make him desire her. They passed the conservatory; it was empty; they went in and sat down.

Fortunata was in white. White is more appealing than any color. The palms and the exotic foliage cast a discreet shadow. Languorously through the leaves the music penetrated, and one forgot that this throbbing, palpitating song was made by brass and strings of catgut.

"Are you fond of this waltz?" she asked him.

He answered: "It was our first dance together, do you remember?"

She said: "I have not forgotten. We shall not

meet again for a long time—if at all,” she added, after a pause, during which she looked at him intently, as though to impress his face on her memory forever.

“What do you mean?” he asked, startled.

“I am leaving Rome.”

“Leaving Rome?”

“Yes. I am going to Florence. Guido thinks of opening his house. I can help Antonia. Besides, I mean to give up society.”

“But why? For what reason?”

“Disillusionment, weariness. As I grow older, the hard work, the futility of it all comes home to me. The Palazzo Colibri is uncongenial. I have nothing in common with any one. I am a stranger there, an alien. The sooner I am gone the better. I am tired—too tired to keep up any longer.”

In the dim light she was as appealing as a child, as pale and shadowy as a phantom.

A tenderness so acute as to be almost suffering transfixed Richard.

“I shall not see you for a long time—for months, perhaps?”

“No.”

“I shall not see you—why, that means that I can’t speak with you, or bow to you even! You mustn’t go, you sha’n’t go! Forgive me, of course you are the one to decide—it is none of my business. I don’t want to interfere!”

How cautious he is! thought Fortunata.

“You are a kind, a devoted friend,” she murmured, grateful—and in thankfulness, no doubt—she gave him her hand.

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"A friend? Oh, Fortunata, if you only knew! I can't let you go, because I love you! There, I've said it—I knew I would. Be my wife. Promise you will marry me! Promise!"

"I cannot!"

"I won't believe that you don't care for me. It isn't possible that I can love you as I do, and you feel nothing."

"There are many reasons—"

"Give me one!"

"I could give you twenty. The difference in our religions."

"What of that?"

"Your mother's prejudice against foreigners."

"Ah, Fortunata, when she sees you, when she sees how good you are—how beautiful—she can't help but love you more even than your own mother."

"I must not—" from Fortunata, in a hesitating voice. "It is impossible, impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible! You shall marry me! You are as necessary to me as breath or food. It is only a question of time."

She raised her eyes and looked at him, smiling tenderly.

"Since it is inevitable, Lord Trevers—Richard—Dick—then—"

CHAPTER XXII

NEXT morning, very early it seemed to Fortunata, Lord Trevers's card was brought up to her.

"We must tell the Princess," said she, and taking Richard by the hand, she led him to her aunt.

The Colibri was in the morning-room drinking curaçoa and smoking her cigarette. In the full sunlight her face seemed yellow and soft, as though about to melt like a wax mask. She wore a cap drawn down to her ears and crowned by a wreath of artificial flowers gone to seed. At her side, chained by the leg to his perch, Coco sang his ribald songs and laughed his loud, insane laugh.

Lord Trevers, looking very pale, bowed to her Excellency.

"I have promised to marry Richard," said Fortunata. "I'm so happy!"

"Ah! Carissima!" cried the Colibri, in a quavering voice, and assuming the manner of a kind old guardian on the stage, "This is a happy moment! Sit down, children. Sit down. Ah, youth! Ah, happiness!"

Lord Trevers offered Fortunata a chair and took one himself, his serious eyes fixed on the Princess.

"Who can doubt Providence?" continued her Excellency. "Who can doubt there is a power, shel-

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tering, directing—*al diavolo, quell' uccello!*—devil take that bird!”

“He’s so noisy,” admitted Fortunata.

“Fortunata goes out one morning, turns a certain corner, happens to meet you, Lord Trevers. From that moment you are drawn to each other. Now, had Fortunata decided not to buy a certain green hat—”

“A blue hat, Princess,” corrected Richard.

“Quite so, a blue hat, Lord Trevers; you see, an incident, a mere nothing can change a life, so the fate of a woman can hang on a little green hat.”

“It was blue,” said Lord Trevers, “and it was rather large.”

“Forgive me! A blue hat. Ah, here comes the Marchesa.”

“Antonia,” said Fortunata, “I am very happy; kiss me.”

The Marchesa looked at her sister, her great moist eyes blazing with tenderness. She kissed Fortunata on the forehead, and held out both hands to Lord Trevers, who bowed sternly, as might the prophet Saint John to the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse.

“Ah, Fortunata!” cried the Princess, who had forgotten the rôle of kind old guardian, “what cold-storage manners the English have! Is it any wonder they can stand the Indian climate and the tropics?”

“Lord Trevers,” said Antonia, in her careful English, and warm, vibrant voice, “I wish you may find in your marriage all the happiness that makes the relationship of man and wife the most beautiful thing on earth.”

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"In marriage, Antonia, we are no better than animals," cried the Colibri, throwing away her cigarette; "but in love we are far better. No one knows better than you, Antonia, that from a lover, at least, you meet with consideration, with gratitude—"

"Richard," cried Fortunata, "see what a funny face Coco is making! I want to tell you something! Come along!" She bustled about and managed to rout him out of the room.

Fortunately, he had caught little of the conversation. He knew scarcely any Italian. He could never think of two things at once, and had been conscientiously intent on making his bow to the ladies.

The world heard; the world was astonished and surer than ever that Lord Trevers was brave, but not intelligent. On the Princess's reception-day her Excellency held forth on Fortunata's prospects. The Colibri was in transports, while Fortunata, looking in her tea-gown like a child in disguise, sat modestly at her aunt's side.

From the hall voices approached, the tread of feet, the whisper of silk.

The hubbub grew. The door flew open, and in strode Miss Case with a dozen men. Her *crêpe-de-chine* dress clung to her as though she were risen from the sea. She passed through the room, shouting greetings, nicknames, personal remarks, nodding her plumed hat.

Fortunata, at the tea-table, sprang up to welcome her. The girls met in each other's arms. "Dearest Fortunata!" "Dear Pearl!" They drew off, cov-

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ertly watchful, each summing up the other's state of looks, dislike in both hearts and disquietude.

"Am I to congratulate you?"

"Dearest Pearl, it depends on what."

"Then, it isn't true?"

"What isn't true?"

"I said I didn't believe it."

"You mystify me."

"I always knew you wouldn't have Dick Trevers."

"Ah, you are so intuitive, sometimes."

"Well, he isn't your kind." Miss Case's face had smoothed out like linen under a hot iron. "I heard, but gossip is so silly."

"Yes, isn't it? Lord Trevers and I are good friends."

"Exactly what I said."

"And I have promised to marry him."

"Ah!" It was a knock-down blow, but Pearl did not flinch. "Ah, well," she said, with patronage, "we'll hope that it will turn out all right."

"Thank you. It's worth the risk."

They dropped hands, but continued to smile into each other's eyes.

Really, it was not much more amusing being engaged to this Englishman than to poor old Raoul. Fortunata found that she had grown quite attached to the Prince, after a filial fashion. She often caught herself wondering had he left Rome? Would she ever see him again? She missed his gnome-like little face. Still, on the whole, she was much better off. Now she had a *fiancé* to be proud of—young, attractive, very handsome. But, heavens, isn't he stupid! was Fortunata's secret thought.

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The Princess invariably referred to him as "the corpse" or "the body." He was a persevering lover; came early; stayed late, and, like all true lovers, appeared imbecile. With the Prince, however tiresome his protestations, Fortunata had been at least spared all importunate caresses. He had approached her as an idol, and never dared to touch her hand without bows and grimaces and excuses. Dick did not conceal his feelings. His kisses, although he never guessed it, meant nothing to Fortunata. She knew nothing of the thrilling ecstasy of nearness, and could find no pleasure in having him for hours at her side, voiceless with love, her hands in his.

He told her of his family and home, the details of a prosaic life. In fancy she saw the well-kept house, the well-fed horses and servants. Method, comfort, respectability. Great observance to custom, to prejudice. Humdrum gentry coming to call. Long roads leading to dull visits, to dull garden-parties, to dull tennis tournaments. The tolling of the bell for some poor old body in the workhouse causing a sensation. Now that she was bound over to this life, it did not seem to be as full of promise as while she had been still fighting to be Lady Trevers.

"When we are married," he said to her one day, "I'm going to take you home. I want my people to see you."

"Oh, I sha'n't be happy, Dick, till I meet your mother and your dear sisters!"

"I have other relatives, too," he said. And he added, with perhaps a touch of regret, "I've sometimes thought I'd like to take you off where I could

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have you all to myself, all the time, dearest. The others will be wanting you to help. Mother has got lots of work with her charities, her Bible classes and things. She keeps the village together; there's no one like her. She has a tree every Christmas in the ball-room—"

"The ball-room!" cried Fortunata, brightening. "Do you give balls?"

"We did when the girls came out."

"Ah!"

"Oh, I tell you the mater does a lot of good," he continued, "and my sisters help her. They are jolly girls; they'll like you. I've written that you're like an English girl."

"That, of course," said Fortunata, "is what I want to be." In imagination she saw herself claiming kin with countless Britishers, just like Richard, only women.

A French saying there is, that the woman who is all in all to a man is never she who really loves him. She may be his through caprice, or self-interest, or a momentary impulse—never can he keep, often never has he had, her heart. If, then, a man were ever laying up for himself a future of self-deception, of disappointment, of heartbreak, it was Dick Trevers, who loved Fortunata profoundly. This commonplace youth was transformed; his dulness and muteness began to fall from him. He used his words better; his vocabulary grew. His passion to him was a miracle. He expressed himself not unquaintly.

Lord Trevers's visits were from dusk to late hours, and Fortunata found the evenings long, very long.

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At times she pleaded fatigue, and would not leave her room. Every seven days she was taken with a violent headache, and the time between was interspersed with chills, ague fits, and touches of fever.

"Look out," the Colibri warned her, "the first thing you know Richard Trevers will break off the engagement! These Englishmen are hipped on the subject of healthy wives."

Fortunata would have found the time passed with her *fiancé* less unendurable had it not been for his everlasting talk about his mother.

"My dear mother!" said Dick, tenderly, as he handed Fortunata the photograph of a fierce old lady, with a very short bang and a very long face.

From Dick's unconscious revelations she concluded that Lady Trevers had many prejudices and very bad manners. The Signorina Rivallo sent her future mother-in-law a very flattering note, and, without being too obsequious, hinted at a knowledge of her own unworthiness. In answer she received a very dismal letter. Lady Trevers wrote that she was long acquainted with the fact that a man must leave his mother and cleave unto his wife, and then followed two sentences more of an equally Christian and prosaic nature.

Fortunata had brought about, had accomplished, what she had long desired. Richard had no other thought than her, yet she was not particularly happy. On two stiff chairs they sat out the evenings, while at the room's far end a dim figure, some member of the family, kept watch in the cautious Italian fashion. Either the Princess Colibri held a jeering eye on the lovers, or the discreet Antonia

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turned away her head. As night came down the candles could not dissipate the gloom. No one saw if Dick's arm was around Fortunata's shoulders.

"Ah, if we could stay this way for centuries!" Richard whispered, breathing into her pompadour.

At the mere thought of such a prolonged visit, she had a crick in her back.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOWEVER brilliant Fortunata's engagement from a pecuniary and social standpoint, Rome received the news without enthusiasm. The English, though fashionable in Italy, are not popular.

Fortunata found herself out of favor at home, and very much in debt in the city. She got black looks from Guido. One day after dinner he followed her up the steps, growling like a dog. He overtook her on the landing.

"All the English are pigs," he said. "Why do you marry one? San sacramento!" he swore, grasping her by the arm, "I'd like to wring your neck!"

She was frightened, and crouched like any street urchin, her arm across her face.

He thought better of it, and merely gave her wrist a wrench. Such incidents were of daily occurrence. Life in the Palazzo was becoming impossible. Guido was hardly ever sober, and as brutal as a peasant. One night, coming home after some carousal, he struck his wife, who, dishevelled and half-dressed, rushed to Luigi for protection. She tore into his room, pale as the dead, with her hair on end and a face like Medusa. The men came to blows. They could be heard all over the house, cursing and shrieking.

Fortunata, Eugenio, Francesca, the Contessa, with

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a hot-water bag in her hand, the Princess mysterious and awful in night-robes, came from their rooms fearful of fire and calamity, while the servants, with candles, ran about distracted. Hardly a night passed without some such disturbance, turning this house of the aristocracy into a tenement made hideous by brawls.

Luigi, since his rebuff, had assumed for Fortunata a manner of overdone gallantry, a tone of playful irony, that somehow made her ill at ease. His love affair with Antonia, a sort of sentimental tantrum one might have called it, was still in full swing. Luigi began to absent himself often and for long intervals. Antonia took to moping in her room. She hardly slept, and ate even less, and, as ever, the singular creature was sincere.

The Princess was in her element. She revelled in ill-feeling. She put every one at loggerheads. She encouraged Eugenio to spend his time and his money and his hope on La Vallière.

"Per Dio! one must see the world; one must know women!" She jeered at Fortunata that the day of her nuptials was not yet definitely decided. "It's always the bird of paradise that never finds a mate." She kept Billford so flustered that the poor old soul was ready to turn a handspring, and Francesca went about half the time with eyes that were red from weeping. The Princess found for the Contessa a new disease, and old Nello walked backward before her Excellency.

In such surroundings it was in vain for Fortunata to keep up a semblance of respectability. Burdened by debts, badgered by Guido, harassed by Luigi,

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teased by the Princess, forced unwillingly to be Antonia's confidante, she longed for the morning that was to make her free forever. But as yet nothing was decided, no date named, no arrangements made.

The Princess had generously allowed her favorite a certain small reception-hall off the *sala*, wherein Fortunata might entertain her own visitors. Lord Trevers's pride, the pride of the gentleman and of the Englishman, was chafed to see his future wife, day after day, the centre of a group of familiar young men whose glances spoke no very respectful admiration.

Fortunata, always awake to the main chance, was alarmed.

If things go on like this, she thought, I can't hope to succeed.

Trevers, fierce as a Saracen to his rivals, was always at her side, and her acquaintances fell from her, chilled by his arctic manner. Her men friends faded out of her life, became mere phantoms, pleasant, frivolous ghosts, which at heart she regretted.

Life at the Palazzo Colibri could not fail to disgust Lord Trevers, true Britisher and lover of the conventional. To be sure, the English nobility is not over-scrupulous. Bills go long unpaid in England, but the fashion of dunning is more elegant than that employed in Italy—the best people owe, but they owe without shame or squalor. Here in Rome was a family living by its wits, spending other people's money, denying their doors to creditors, disclaiming bills, clamored at by tradespeople, and gaining the day's dinner by cheating. One would

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scarcely choose a wife out of a gaming-hell, yet play ran very high in the Princess's boudoir. At two in the morning baccarat was in full swing. The cards were shuffled and dealt in the unearthly dawn. Strangers and Americans played with her Excellency, nor did they play often, for she had too consistent luck. The Princess Colibri had promised Fortunata her help, but the old buffoon, when talking with Richard, could not forbear jibes at the English, whom she cordially disliked.

"What a silly idea that is," she once said, "that because one comes from England, one must have prominent teeth. I remember, we once had an English consul who had none at all—" or, "I have always contradicted, Lord Trevers, the rumor that your Queen drank."

A few days later Fortunata threw open her aunt's door. "It is settled for the third, Zia!" she cried, with the look of one who has just won a race; and she added, fervently, "Praise be to the Madonna!"

Her future was assured. Effort, anxiety, were over and done with, yet she was hardly happier. She feared this new life; she clung to the old. The days slipped past—evaded her, as it were. The sun went down on the last evening of her girlhood, and as sleep overtook her she yielded with terror, for all the sooner must come the ominous to-morrow.

Next morning the sun was well up when Fortunata, lying in her bed, supine and straight as an arrow, suddenly opened her eyes wide.

This is my wedding-day, thought she, and a limitless sadness swept over her. Poor child, whose nature was to pursue with inexhaustible ardor her

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aims, which, when attained, she invariably found to be irksome, worthless. She was panic-stricken now to find herself all but married to a man for whom she felt not the least inclination, not the faintest tremor of love, and whose caresses, were the truth known, inspired her almost with aversion. She lay prone, passionately regretting the subterfuges, the artifices, the clever way by which she had brought about this long-aimed-at state of things. Her old friends, the gargoyles, looked down on her, she thought, with melancholy—uncouth, faithful little monsters, under whose familiar care she would likely enough never sleep again. It was brutally plain that the dreams in which she had known herself radiant, trembling with love on going to the arms of her bridegroom, must be resigned forever.

“As a joyous waking to the bridal morning,” mused Fortunata, gloomily, “I don’t think much of this.” And she put her long, narrow white feet out of bed.

The rest of the day was a dream—jumbled, chaotic, weighted with foreboding.

She was aware of Antonia, vibrant with sympathy, smoothing the folds of the bridal veil, while out of the glass her own face looked at her, very pale, very small, like that of a little phantom. She came down the stairs, and her dress whispered round her feet. Some people below looked at her and said “Ah!” Next, the English Embassy, the giant footman throwing open the door, and there she stood with Richard in the centre of the room, and the acute odor of the lilies took her at the throat. Richard put a ring on her finger; his big, cool hand held hers.

Next, he was with her alone in a carriage. He was telling her for the hundredth time his disappointment that his mother, the fondest, the most devoted of parents, could not bring herself to leave England, even for his marriage. She said, "It is too bad!" And she saw a scar on his forehead that she had never seen before.

Then, tedious complications—going before caged men, signing one's name; then back again to what used to be home. Hundreds of people came up to her holding out their hands. She shook these hands. The new ring cut into her fingers. Then the shadows began to eat—why, she could not imagine. Subconsciously, she went to her room like a sleep-walker, and made ready for departure, assisted by Hortense. Hortense was in tears. Hymen made her cry. It was a habit.

Without a word Fortunata slipped into a travelling-dress whose modest sleeves ended in points on the backs of her hands. Before the glass she pinned on her toque; from the mirror her eyes looked back at her as at a stranger—gravely, almost with reproach. She sent the maid with the valise from the room. The genial sun shone in. Kind old chairs! Sheltering bed!

Good-bye—never again—are awful words. It hurt her to close the door. It went to her heart to turn the knob and shut out her gay, ambitious, unscrupulous girlhood.

"Viva la Principessa! Viva la Colibri! Viva la Fortunata!"

The hall, damp as the catacombs, swarmed with guests, drinking and disporting, while the carriage

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that was to take Lord and Lady Trevers away stood blistering in the sun.

Fortunata came down the stairs swiftly, wrapped in a discreet cloak. She looked gentle and good, long and narrow, like a Fra Angelico angel. Around her toque her nebulous hair made a halo. Eugenio, sentimental with drinking his sister's health, met her at the foot of the stairs, took both her hands, kissed one and then the other, exclaiming, in Italian, "I wish you every happiness, most sympathetic of sisters!" Then countless good-byes—Guido and Luigi, de Brillac and Marcel—partners, suitors, flames of a month ago, last season's admirers. To Fortunata's surprise, not to say disappointment, they all bore up bravely. For a minute she stood scanning these faces, meeting here and there eyes that had once held her the rarest thing on earth. To leave no regrets stabbed her. She made her way to the Princess Colibri, kissed her aunt's hand, and bending down her cloud of indefinite brown hair, murmured something ending in gratitude. Her Excellency's answer was prodigiously amusing, to judge from the laughter it evoked. Fortunata had, however, already turned away. Antonia, always capable of emotion, clasped her sister in her arms, kissed her fervently on the brow—rekissed her, to the disarrangement of the toque and to Fortunata's secret annoyance. As for Fortunata's mother, she laid her face on her daughter's shoulder and rolled her head feebly from side to side. She seemed about to perish with grief for the loss of this child, whom she had never known, whom she had never watched over—for the loss of this acquaintance, this fellow-lodger.

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The ladies nearby had tears in their eyes—the dowagers and mothers and marriageable daughters who had backbitten and slyly abused Fortunata for the last four years. Tears are cheap in Italy. Nello wept. The majordomo wept. Miss Billford wept. And all the while Francesca waved a handkerchief and piped, “Be happy! Be very, very happy!”

Richard, with the aspect of a pall-bearer officiating at the hearse, helped his wife into the carriage. His expression would have depressed a less self-appreciative bride. Decorous in sorrow, he sat down by her side and closed the door.

“Viva! Viva la Fortunata!”

A storm of rice struck the window, a black blotch like a bat eddied over the carriage—the legendary shoe cast by Miss Billford, who, in the emotions of the day, forgot for once her deep-rooted antipathy to superstition. The coachman cracked his whip, and they were on their way! Dick kept repeating, “One hat box, two valises, and three trunks,” staring at Fortunata as though he would eat her up.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE train ran a frantic course along the western shore of Italy, through fertile fields, past hills veiled in mist. They had a compartment to themselves.

He said: "Our life is beginning. Are you happy?"

She said: "Oh, yes! Of course, very."

"You are my wife, my own; you belong to me; you are mine!"

His voice was altered.

The breathless train soothed down a little.

"Don't, Dick, don't!"

"I must kiss you!"

"We are slowing up."

"God! How I love you!"

"We are stopping!"

"You're so pretty!"

"That fat person will see you, Richard!"

And sure enough, a stout *bourgeoise* laden with packages was striving to climb into the compartment. She would have stuck in the door forever, and Dick must needs pull her through. He took her bundles from her with the ferocity of a robber, and aimed them desperately at the valise-rack, then hoisted in the lady herself, a comfortable omnipresence. She filled the seat opposite, and, planted there, jolted all the way to Pisa.

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Sincerely Fortunata blessed her!

Lord and Lady Trevers, with a maid, a valet, and a mountain of luggage, stopped at the Hotel Superba, Pisa.

The mere aspect of the room filled Fortunata with foreboding. In the centre of the high and dirty ceiling, an ornate, much-bebranched gas-fixture threw an ungracious light that beat down on the expanse of bed, a starchy bed, whose twin pillows brutally declared it for two. To the windows there were no curtains, only inside shutters with melancholy ribs. The inhospitable fireplace was closed up with boards. Over the mantel hung a chromo of a lady letting down her back hair.

Hortense placed the bridal bouquet in the water-pitcher's gaping mouth. The maid's aspect was portentous, and her gestures awesome. She gained on her mistress's nerves, and Fortunata dismissed for the night the faithful servant. The Contessina passed into the next room—a bare parlor, redolent of plaster and matting. Richard came in, pushing the door to with his arm. There was about him a suppressed elation.

"Let me help you off with your jacket."

"Thank you," she said, in a meek voice, like that of a little girl. The *maître d'hôtel* followed, bearing in the supper. He laid the cloth and placed the dishes. The chairs were drawn confidently on either side of the little table.

"Some cold chicken, Fortunata?" asked Richard.

Fortunata seemed heart and soul with the management of the hotel. She questioned the waiter as to the number of guests—were there any Italians?

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As to the ornament on the table, a china porcupine whose quills served as toothpicks, her curiosity was unappeasable.

Lord Trevers's sombre face drove the waiter away. Fortunata saw with regret the retreating coat-tails. The door shut. The table seemed very narrow; their knees touched. The salad stuck in her throat, and the dry lady-fingers choked her. She grew sadder and sadder, less and less brave.

The waiter was back; he cleared off the table and was gone again.

Dick came to his wife and put his arms around her. "My darling, you are not going to sit all evening in that hat and boa?"

"Oh, no, of course not—" resolutely. "I shall take it off." And she took off the hat.

"That high collar must choke you."

"I shall take that off, too," said Fortunata, in the reckless voice with which one might cry, "Here goes; I have no modesty left!" and she took off the collar. Under the pretence of laying it down, she made the circuit of the room, Dick following in her steps. She sat down gingerly on the edge of an arm-chair. She hung her head, to account for which she twiddled with her shoe-laces.

Dick knelt at her feet and unlaced her boots. "I love to do these little things for you," he said. The harsh light showed her a new face. She found that she had never seen him before. How strange, thought she, here am I, the Fortunata I have known for twenty-two years, here at Pisa, in the night, with this fair-haired man.

He felt her gaze, looked up, and bent across her to

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kiss her. His fingers grasped her shoulders, passed down her arms and pressed her hands, as they lay palms upward on the seat of the chair, pressed them into the yielding velvet, down, down! His lips seized hers. She closed her eyes to shut out the stranger's face.

CHAPTER XXV

“**W**HY, it's raining!” Lord Trevers said to the groom at Russelford Station. Raining was an inadequate word—the sluices of heaven were open.

“Wery bad weather, as we've been 'aving, lately, my Lord. Wery poor weather for your Lordship's lady to see the country. Never see'd nothing like it myself.”

Hortense, regretful, drooped amid the luggage. She had not straightened her hat since crossing to Dover.

Fortunata was exhilarated by the good smell of earth, by the mystery of the rain, by the dim trees and their nebulous branches. She had come into her kingdom. Thoughtfully, under the hood of her coat, she looked out. In getting into the brougham, she made an inventory. Money and comfort, but a lack of elegance, thought the future owner. She thrust her pretty head out of the window. The rain beat her face. She felt her hair come out of curl, and did not care. Hospitable England, that no moist nor fog can render melancholy! Groomed fields, if one may use the word; comfortable cows; sleek beasts; sheltered homes whose thatched roofs settle on their four walls, it seems, with a blessing. Fortunata remembered that, as a child, when traips-

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ing about with her disreputable father, she had even then felt the peace and well-being of this country.

The rain ceased; the mist lifted; the sun showed his face. "That's Goody Bridgeman," said Dick, nodding, and Fortunata smiled on an old woman who was feeding her pig beside a stile. The bucolic English have a native refinement. The owner of the pig, the pig himself, had an air of race.

"By George, Fortunata, I first learned to vault with a pole over this stile. See that wooded ridge? it's the best hunt for foxes in Wiltshire. By the way, Pennam, I see that Meeker has filled up the ditch where the chestnut mare sprained her foreleg. How is her leg, and how's Lightning after the spavin, and how's my mother?"

As the brougham passed, all the he and she farmers, as in an English novel, curtsied and bowed. It is agreeable to be curtsied and bobbed to. The village and the belfry church, the lodge gates on their stone columns, the majestic park, the Elizabethan mansion, formal, gabled, built of stone—they may be read of in Jane Austen and George Eliot. As the beech avenue thickened and closed in, Richard began at his eternal, "Mother likes this," and "Mother likes that." He was evidently nervous. But Fortunata's courage rose with danger. She steeled herself for the encounter, although outwardly making herself very small, assuming a gentle and sedate expression.

Four gaudy peacocks swaggered on the lawn and swelled their brazen chests. Self-assurance is the essential, thought Fortunata, watching. Her ordeal was passed. She had found the Dowager Lady

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Trevers a grenadier of a woman, cumbrously built and long of tooth, a shade sterner and more terrible than even Lady Bolton. Where the English Ambassador was without hope, her sister could burn with righteous indignation. One was fat and lymphatic, in grief for the world; the other emaciated and austere, with strenuous Christian effort. Fortunata, accustomed to the tumultuous Italian greetings, to the kisses on both cheeks, to the ebullitions of the South, was not a little discomfited when her mother-in-law merely gave her a hand as unresponsive as a dead fish, and said, with decent gloom: "The wife of my Richard is, of course, welcome, Fortune—ahem—Fortunia."

"—nata, mother dear," from the Ladies Gwendolyn and Amelia. They were the counterparts of the Misses Bolton, the same genial, kindly creatures, and they greeted Fortunata cordially. She endured a strenuous handshaking, for they were muscular young ladies.

They must needs drag her over the house and show her the room where Dick was born; the window he jumped from to win a wager; the roof he had walked on in his sleep—to all of which Fortunata answered: "Yes, Gwendolyn, darling," and "Yes, Amelia, dear," while sizing up her sisters-in-law and planning her future campaign.

She found in her room what she guessed to be a bathtub, shallow as a saucer and full of humps. Its strange proportions made her feel even more of an alien to England.

I must be very simple, mused Fortunata, dressing for dinner, childlike and confiding. Accordingly,

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she modified her pompadour, took off her puffs and earrings, removed all traces of powder, and encased her throat in a dog-collar—still she was suggestively feminine.

As she went down to dinner, leaning on her husband's arm, she appraised the furniture with her keen, dark eyes. Her mother-in-law received her in the library, a wainscoted room, conventional and luxurious. The Dowager stood in the firelight, her head erect, as gaunt and weather-beaten as a Viking. In the farther corner the Ladies Gwendolyn and Amelia were playing at tiddle-de-winks, their big, pleasant faces blooming out of their muslin frocks.

Dinner was announced, and proved to Fortunata impossibly dull. The food was good, the room handsome, the plate sumptuous, yet she thought with regret of the scrappy meals of the Palazzo Colibri. Dick talked of the crops, a never-ending theme. He discussed the cattle and their ailments in a way that Fortunata considered disgusting. Catching sight of him through the ferns of the centre-piece, of his high-poised, self-sufficient head, she concluded that she did not like him—no, not in the least!

"Richard," said the Dowager, decapitating a trout with the look of an executioner, "I am under the care of an excellent physician, Doctor Powell. His work is kept up entirely by correspondence."

"Oh, mater, these quacks get such a hold on you."

"You interrupt me, my son. He is a man of parts. His elixir for rheumatism, his sunbeams for headache are remarkable homœopathic remedies."

"No more headaches? Oh, wonders of science!"

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warbled Fortunata, clasping her hands and looking up with all the warmth of Southern enthusiasm. "Will you give me Doctor Powell's address, Lady Trevers?"

"Most certainly, Fortune—ahem—Fortunia."

After dinner, while the ladies were drinking coffee around the library fire, and Lord Trevers was left to his solitary port: "I hear that you smoke, like all foreign women," observed the Dowager, with that aggressive voice the English sometimes affect even on their own hearth.

"I did, but Richard disapproves, and Richard's wishes, Lady Trevers, are law to me."

"Most Italians dress in poor style," said the Dowager, "but you have a sweetly pretty frock."

"If you like it, I am glad," Fortunata answered, with one of her irresistible smiles, and from this moment the Dowager thawed.

"Let's have some music," said Dick, lounging in, and as at the voice of the Pasha, his sisters flew to the piano.

"What shall we play, Dickie?" cried they.

"Oh, something jolly," said Dick.

"Play 'Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming,'" the Dowager commanded, closing her eyes preparatory to being entranced.

Fortunata was amazed to see the fierce old head rock to and fro in enjoyment of music so maudlin.

"Fortunata can play; and she can sing, too," Dick declared.

"Oh, Richard!" cried Fortunata.

"Pray sing, Fortuniria," the Dowager was kind enough to say.

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"Pray do!" clamored the girls.

So Fortunata went to the piano and played those sweet, simple songs that charmed our grandmothers and still, at times, charm us—"The Last Rose of Summer," "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms," "Oh, My Darling." As she sang, her profile assumed the delicacy and purity of a child's. The Dowager was moved, the girls ecstatic, Dick very proud.

In her room that night Fortunata threw open the window. The rain still fell incessantly, drenching the great trees of the park.

Thousands of acres, she thought, and they all belong to me.

CHAPTER XXVI

FORTUNATA, contemplating her mother-in-law next morning at breakfast, concluded that she had never seen any one at all resemble her. The Dowager did not look like a woman nor a man—she was merely a British matron. The Dowager's reign was over, and she needs must abdicate in favor of her daughter-in-law. Caroline Trevers was a very Christian woman; her co-dwellers were but too well acquainted with the fact. Now, when supplanted, her humility was truly awful.

Arrayed in a camel's-hair wrapper, she waylaid Fortunata in the hall, and offered to give up the keys of the pantry, with an aspect more forlorn than that of the famous burgesses of Ghent, who came in their night-shirts to surrender the citadel. In vain did Fortunata waive all rights; the Dowager would not lay claim even to the mattress on which she had slept for forty years. So humble was she grown that she dare not decide questions the most trivial without Fortunata's permission. The daughter-in-law must point out the exact spot on the table-cloth where the decanter of claret should stand.

"Don't come to me, John, for your orders," the Dowager would say to the footman. "Go to her ladyship"; and a huge person in canary-colored

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smalls would stalk across to Fortunata, not a little to her anxiety.

"Which is your favorite—a brown betty or a batter pudding?" the Dowager would ask, in tones more dreadful than Lady Macbeth's.

"Why, really, I don't know; I like them both."

"That is no answer."

"Well, then, a brown betty," ventured Fortunata, at random. The name sounded gypsy-like and gay.

"It is a question of taste," acquiesced the Dowager, but in such a funereal voice, and with an expression so despairing, that Fortunata wished she had chosen the batter pudding.

Fortunata was indefatigable in her efforts to please. The chirpings began at eight o'clock in the morning—to her an ungodly hour. To rise early made her feel ill invariably. Nevertheless, she officiated at her end of the table, her proud prerogative being to pour out the coffee, with an air worthy of the allegorical Peace and Plenty. Breakfast over, with its Yarmouth bloaters and variegated jams, the girls took to playing Ouija and other dismal and prophetic games.

"Oh, Fortunata, do come and see Richard!" one of them would cry, their faces plastered to the window-pane, their noses turning pale.

And Fortunata must needs contemplate the tall young man, in a flannel shirt, old knickerbockers and very dirty boots, directing the farmers, pointing a brown wrist toward the drizzling horizon. This blond youth was her husband, yet he was nothing to her. When he kissed her, she was not

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that self she had always known, and, fact unbelievable, this man in whose arms she slept was to her no one—nothing. The line of the hills was no longer discernible. It had melted away in the mist, resigned to an eternal downpour. The curate's carry-all had passed—the girls had caught a glimpse of it through the foliage of the park—and Lady Hicklebury's brougham went by, spraying mud.

"Gingerbread for lunch!" they cried, and one might suspect as much from a pungent odor that pervaded the house. Fortunata was overtaken by loneliness, by a yearning for her own country, by an attack of nostalgia.

Oh, Italy, thought Fortunata, incomparable land of the South!

Fortunata danced attendance on the Dowager. She attended her mother-in-law on a tour of inspection. The Dowager Lady Trevers tramped the fields and passed, unlike Camilla, very heavily across the wheat. Ruth and Naomi were never more together. They visited the vegetable garden, the henyard, the barn. Fortunata was all intelligent interest. She made the round mouth of admiration. She threw out countless "Ohs!" The cows, she said, had very lovely eyes. How fat the ducks were, and yet how shapely.

The pleasantest hour was when, the sun beginning to decline—and the weather permitting—tea was served on the lawn among the old elms, to the cawing of the rooks. Toasted cakes, buns, muffins, were offered by the magnanimous footmen, with a sad and generous air. Stock-on-Tremp in the background loomed flat as cardboard, like the fortress of

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a theatre. After tea Fortunata went to her room. Sunset is a dreary hour for those away from home. She wrote to the Princess or her mother. The letter to her Excellency was very jocular always, prodigiously entertaining; the Contessina poked all manner of fun at her old bore of a mother-in-law, at her wearisome husband, and more tiresome sisters. To her mother she wrote vaunting the merits of Doctor Powell's Germ Exterminator. She entreated her to ask of the Dowager further particulars as to these remedies. "Please do; it will make us both so popular, mother dearest," wrote the sly little wretch. Or, else, she watched the melancholy northern sunset. Hardly was it to be believed that this was the same orb that blazed down behind St. Peter's in purple and gold. I was happier, thought she, before I got myself a husband. Indeed, those were pleasant days when she was on the warpath and out for blood. Days of freedom! Oh, blessed Liberty! The rooks sailed cawing through the trees. She could not see for a mist before her eyes.

Sometimes of an evening the rain ceased. In the long English twilights Richard and Fortunata went for their walk. When distant from the hall, he would put his arm around her, and at his side demurely she would go, more like a good child taken out for an airing than an ecstatic bride. They walked on the wet grass and under the dripping branches. In the pasture the cows lay like bundles, indistinct in the mist and the drizzle. Then Richard would tell her that he loved her and that she was very pretty, which, of course, was flattering, yet at this hour always she knew a poignant sadness.

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His arm was about her, strong to shield; his heart that loved her beat against her breast, yet she was solitary and regretful. She alone knew herself; never—no, never—could she love any one! The tree-toads were hushed. Everything slept. Only the anxious gnats circled about and fussed, and could not rest.

“What tedious flies!” Dick would say, clutching at the air.

Some women love only those indifferent to them, and worship such as maltreat them. Fortunata belonged to this unmagnanimous order. Had Dick beaten her regularly once a day, she might have grown to love him, and have become an obedient and devoted wife. As it was, the big blond oaf had no discernment. He squandered his heart on her, and thus estranged her more and more. He bored her to extinction, and to be bored Fortunata could not forgive. To faults she would have been indifferent. In crime she might have become interested; but to such stale jokes and annoying mannerisms she could not reconcile herself. He has no conversation, he has no ideas! thought the bride. He said “Confound it!” or “Fancy!” till she thought she would scream. His way of speaking her name, his “Fortunata this” and “Fortunata that” was a pain to her. Talking he bored her, and he bored her silent; he bored her laughing, and he bored her sulky. He bored her when he kissed her, and he bored her, if anything, more when he didn’t; he bored her just sitting there, with his handsome, regular features and big expressionless eyes. He got on her nerves like the squeaking of a slate-pencil. Had it not been for his worship of her,

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never could she have endured him! But she had a just mind. She had made a bargain, and was anxious to play fair. He is very tiresome, thought she, but he is very necessary, and I shall always be polite. She was invariably gracious, invariably responsive.

One by one the inmates of Stock-on-Tremp fell victims to Fortunata's wiles. To stand well with the household she did not spare herself. Mrs. Krebs, the housekeeper, was besought to write down the recipe for her herring patties and luscious currant jelly.

"We don't have anything like that in Italy."

On being presented to Farmer Lytton's prize sow, Fortunata expressed the intensest satisfaction, and vaguely smiled on all the hayricks in the field.

With Lady Trevers her standing was enviable. She knitted an antimacassar, and was cured of a violent headache by three grains of Doctor Powell's Sunbeams. Also, she ordered the *Plutonian Weekly*, by reason of a graphic picture of "primitive tribes dying of famine in the far East."

Nor with the girls was she less assiduous. In the duets hers was always the difficult but less brilliant part. For their album she found mottoes and stuck in pictures, and messed herself in glue. She marcelled their hair, and let them try on all her hats; at the risk of tearing her clothes, she played tag and blind-man's-buff.

Fräulein Ottilia Schmuck, the German governess and companion, alone remained unsubjected. For Fortunata she entertained that distrust that all well-regulated Germans must feel toward any one with

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a pretence to fashion or an approach to a waist. Indeed, the Contessina had rather overlooked the humble governess, knowing her of little consequence in comparison with that institution, the servants' hall. Yet the poorest retainer may turn the trend of popular feeling, and Fortunata determined to subjugate Fräulein Schmuck. She chose a time when the governess was practising on the piano.

"Te-de-te-tum! Te-de-te-tum!" played Fräulein, happily unconscious, wobbling her flaxen poll from side to side. From the doorway, "Oh, that divine Rubinstein!" sighed Fortunata, in fluent German. There exists a British prejudice to an over amount of culture. Fräulein turned, startled and distrustful, yet stirred in spite of herself by her mother tongue. Fortunata came across until only the table stood between them, then she said: "I have often thought we should be friends. We are both strangers here, both lonely, so far, each, from her own country, each always thinking of her own fatherland." She smiled, half-pleadingly, as she leaned across the table and stretched out her straight white hand. Poor, sentimental Fräulein Schmuck was immediately disarmed. She seized it in both her own: "Ach ja, gnädige Frau! Ach ja!"

She blushed very much and shed her ready German tears. From that day forth Fräulein was Fortunata's sworn slave, waited on her abjectly, and followed her every gesture with gentle, foolish eyes.

Fortunata enjoyed herself hugely, coquetting with the Church of England. She would advance almost into the arms of the Protestant faith, then draw coyly back. To convert her, she had half the

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clergy in Wiltshire, not to mention her mother-in-law. Fortunata was popular always with religious people. The clergy could never withstand her. The deplorable falling away of the church, the ethics and the creed gave her fine opportunities for talk. She assumed the opposed view, argued warmly, grew uncertain, hesitated, said, "Now that you put it to me that way—" listened, edified; across her pretty face dawned the smile of faith.

"Though your wife, Richard, shows the grossest ignorance of spiritual facts, and though her relatives are such that—well, really"—and the Dowager discreetly left the comparison unfinished—"still she humbly admits her shortcomings; she wants to mend; she means well. Indeed, Richard, I believe her to be a young woman of high principle and very fair intelligence."

What praise! Dick was light-headed. He came to his wife: "Mother says that you are so sweet, so good."

Fortunata smiled at him in her gentle way. She answered: "I try to be."

The Ladies Gwendolyn and Amelia were infatuated with their sister-in-law. They clamored for her hats, her stays, her false curls. They bounced into her room without so much as by your leave.

"One or the other," wrote Fortunata to her aunt, "is always at my side, sticking to me. The Siamese twins must have got, oh, so bored with each other! The only peace I know is in my bathtub!"

Fortunata found the time tedious. Since there were no distractions, she planned and worked for the future. Her husband, she determined, must be

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fired with ambition for a diplomatic career. His lethargic nature dismayed her.

"Dear Dick," she said, "if Lord Bolton would only resign, and the first *attaché* be dismissed, and Hawley and Lord Kerryford die off, with a little care and a little cleverness you could be ambassador in no time."

"Hang it, Fortunata, what for?" exclaimed Lord Trevers. "To work like a navvy, to have all the responsibility, no more good times, and all the service to jaw at me."

Narrow mind, mused Fortunata; limited outlook! And she went on braiding her hair, for it was bedtime. Richard stood behind her, looking fondly down on the crown of her head. He was in his shirt-sleeves; a lack of coat is unbecoming to the vulgar, but a gentleman can stand the test.

"Fortunata, you would hardly believe it, but at times I am almost tempted to give up diplomacy."

"My dearest husband, what madness!" the little schemer exclaimed. "Why, Lord Bolton could never get over your loss!" And she added, watching in the glass Richard's face: "You are so clever, you have, when you want to, such tact. If you would only be a little more—what shall I say—well, a little more affable with the Italian *attachés*, and the French, and the rest of them." Richard was at a loss to understand how a well-bred Englishman could waste his time and thought on such foreign vermin. In vain did Fortunata point out that the wise Providence who had created Englishmen had brought into being, for some undoubted

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use, the people of the Continent. "And don't forget, dearest, that I am half Italian."

"Never, never, would one think it!" exclaimed the enamoured Richard, caressing with both hands Fortunata's little triangle of a face.

"Ah, am I then so English?" breathed she, with a sinking of the heart.

"You look like a sweet English girl, the sweetest I have ever seen."

Alas! blundering Richard. "Sweet" and "English" were two adjectives particularly displeasing to the modish Fortunata.

"I am too adaptable," mused she; "true love sees with its own eyes. Yet this land of rain and galoshes has stamped me already. One week more, and my skirt will sag behind *à la* Gwendolyn. It is time I was gone to you, *Italia bellissima*, country of the sun and of the fountains and of the nightingales, home of the *lazzarone*, of all filth, of the chiming of bells—to you, country of my heart!"

CHAPTER XXVII

FORTUNATA was far from prudish, and accustomed to hear the most delicate matters discussed openly after the Italian fashion; still, she was quite unprepared for her mother-in-law's frank concern and candid speculation, which neither time nor company could repress, as to there being as yet no promise of an heir to Lord Trevers's estate. The Dowager's dreadful questions, the waggings of her mournful head, and her eternal reference to Doctor Powell, threw Fortunata into agonies of embarrassment.

"Richard wishes a son first," the Dowager would say. To hear her one would think that Richard's wishes were omnipotent. "And so, of course, I suppose, do you?"

"Oh yes, of course," said Fortunata, but with a glum face, for the Contessina was not devoted to children. "And, indeed," she was wont to say, "why should I be?" Isn't it too annoying, she mused, that a woman of my beauty and talent should be called on to have a family; almost any one can do that.

During the afternoon, if the downpour ceased, the Dowager's landau, a respectable, generous-looking conveyance, drew up at the door. The four ladies went a-driving through the pleasant English lanes.

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The green of the foliage refreshed Fortunata's beauty-loving spirit. The Dowager passed through the village, visited the bed-ridden old women and lent tracts, after the approved manner of the nobility in fiction. Goody Someone in her brick kitchen told the Ladies from the Hall of her aches and her pains and rheumatism. Fortunata's glance strayed into the garden where sturdy, fair-haired children were playing, and she smiled her sweet young smile at them. She suffered, and from a terrible malady—that of *ennui*. To forge ahead by one's wits, to dance out one's unpaid-for shoes, is thrilling and worth while; but oh, the paralyzing sadness of this present humdrum, respectable, comfortable existence!

After dinner, a formal meal, with the footmen in plush, and when humble Schmuck had been banished to feed herself and re-read her mother's letters, Gwendolyn would draw the covering from the harp. She could perform, and with variations, "The Harp That Once through Tara's Halls." As a matter of fact, that harp was rarely still. She clasped the strings with her arms and grasped the frame with her knees, as though shinning up a tree. Or, else, of an evening Gwendolyn and Amelia fatigued the piano with their hurry-up duets. Lord and Lady Trevers faced each other at Authors or Logomachy. To beat Richard was hardly worth while. Lord Trevers, habitually an earnest, conscientious opponent, was now so proud of his wife, that only his love of fair play kept him from cheating in her favor.

"Dear me!" says the Dowager, reading from the

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Plutonian Weekly, "the Congregated Idiots hold their annual picnic on the fifth," or, from a pamphlet, "Girls, your friend, Miss Abbot-Newton, has another little brother."

"Oh, mamma, she has too many already!" cries Amelia.

"Too many! A most offensive observation," says the Dowager; "our best families are dying out. The duty of every female connected with the British aristocracy—"

"Cat!" says Fortunata, playing logomachy.

"Only one T, Fortunata," reproves Richard.

On other evenings the Dowager had whist parties. Bridge had not yet penetrated the old skulls of those invited. Grim Lady Hicklebury drove over from the park, and several red-gilled gentlemen with their ladies sat down to penny points, looking very sad. Lady Trevers had completely won her mother-in-law by learning whist. Fortunata was a flighty player, though with inspirations of genius. In her lapses of memory she asked, "What is trumps?" then drifted into dreams. With what burnings of the heart did she regret her frivolous nights of old. Ah, those waltzes divine, when the roses she wore, crushed against the heart of her partner, gave out their fragrance! Then her feet, untiring, danced through the dawn to the stirring shrillness of the violin. Perfume, are you lost? music, are you stilled forever?

"I take your queen!" cries the Dowager, in the voice of a policeman arresting a robber, and Fortunata, brought back to the meaningless array of black and red spots, sees all the legless court dance in a haze.

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Steadily fell the rain! One might have thought the allegorical windows of heaven were once again opened. The dining-room was funereal. The long, white table shone like a pall. The paper rosettes on the mutton chops drooped in a deep dejection. The butler, grown fat and asthmatic, creaked about with the heavings of a mournful hippopotamus. Nor did the hostess's aspect tend to enliven the banquet—her head, enswathed in an immense turban, gave her the aspect of a fierce and gloom-struck Saracen. On the fish being handed, a voice from the turban hoped that the rain would cease. At coffee the turban feared that if the rain should continue the crops would be entirely rotted. It is no easy task to act at once the talker and the listener—to be as it were a social ventriloquist; but Fortunata, undaunted, performed this feat. She burst into a monologue; she discoursed with animation, with head flung back; her features glowed with their usual excessive pallor, her eyes flashed; she spread her arms in the large Italian gestures. She discussed at random missionary work in the chilling climate of Labrador, the merits of homœopathic treatment, Richard's resemblance to a bust of one of the earlier Roman emperors. The questions asked by herself she volubly answered. At her own remarks she expressed the politest interest or the most boundless surprise. With eloquence she grew light-headed. What an able statesman, thought she, I should have made; and a shade of sadness came over her as at wasted capabilities. The Dowager forgot all austerity, hypnotized by such a flow of language. In the shade of the turban she rolled the eyes of the mesmerized.

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"To-day," said the Dowager, "the Bishop is coming to dine."

"The Bishop!" cried Fortunata. "Oh, how delightful!"

"My Lord Bishop of Halsbury," continued the Dowager, "has done much good."

"Oh, I am dying to meet him!"

"I hope that you will talk with him, Fortunata," said Dick, looking at his mother.

"I hope that he will talk to me," quoth Fortunata.

Mother and son interchanged a glance.

They want to convert me! thought Fortunata. And all day long she was so happy, she said, thinking about the Bishop.

There is such a thing as playing a part over-well. Fortunata's emotion at the prospect of meeting the Bishop was a trifle too profound. One may be carried away by histrionic talent. Like all artists, she was gifted with an astonishing intuition of character. She was, nevertheless, in her self-appreciation, apt to underrate others. She found it easy to deceive, and as she did not credit any one with a sense of the grotesque, rarely exerted her subtlety. On her husband, who in her heart she had summed up as an entire fool, she passed off the grossest artifices and most palpable lies. She was wrong. Richard was not unintelligent. He awoke at moments to a realization of situations, to a grasping of motives. Coming from his lethargic nature, intuition astonished, as might the flash of a meteor in a leaden sky.

"My Lord Bishop!" announced the butler. A jolly old gentleman, with a shock of white hair and

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as rotund as Santa Claus, came bobbing into the room.

"Dear Bishop!" said the Dowager.

"Dear Lady Trevers! And how is Richard?" asked my Lord Bishop of Halsbury, shaking hands with Dick.

"I am well; but I have had a cold," answered Lord Trevers.

"My daughter-in-law, Bishop," said the Dowager, with a glowing tenderness—"my dear Fortunata!"

The Bishop made a bow and Fortunata a curtsy, the demurest ever seen.

"I am charmed!" murmured the Bishop.

"And I," said Fortunata. Whereupon she gave him her hand. He liked all young, pretty creatures. Soon they were the firmest of friends. The clergy never could withstand Fortunata. Such a passing of compliments, such a bowing and bending as took place during dinner between my Lord Bishop and Fortunata! Such smiles, such pretty speeches!

"Champagne?"

"No, thank you," said Fortunata.

"My daughter-in-law never takes wine, Bishop," announced the Dowager.

"I don't care for the taste," murmured Fortunata, with the upward look of a seraph.

But when after dinner the Bishop singled her out where she sat by the fire, and leaving the other guests, mere bucolic gentry, came across to talk with her, she changed her tactics. At first sight she had discovered that he was a genial, pleasant Bishop, who gave not a rap for her religion, and would not care to convert her if he could. He had

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been to Italy, and loved it. They talked of Rome. In spite of herself, her eyes filled with tears at the familiar names. It was pretty to see the old clergyman and Fortunata, her head like a flower turned toward him, both smiling delightedly.

When the company was gone, "Nice old boy, the Bishop," declared Dick.

"His sermons are admirable," announced the Dowager.

"He is kind, I am sure," said Fortunata, "and good."

In marrying, Fortunata had believed that she saw through her husband like glass, that she could wind him like a thread around her finger. She was quickly disillusioned. His simplicity was more apparent than real, an effect given by his British manner—like certain puzzles that to the eye seem easy, but, when studied, prove baffling. To grasp what Richard meant, she had to readjust her views, and even then she did not always understand him.

Lord Trevers bred cattle and horses. He was forever vaunting the perfection of his stock. A colt had a blemish and ended in the shambles. Illness, weakness, infirmity shocked him as things indecent. One morning Richard and she, when walking, had met a boy painfully lame, dragging along on his crutches. Fortunata had stopped to talk with the child, touched by that fragile, appealing combination of youth and illness. All the while Dick kept murmuring "Come on!" The child passed. Looking up at her husband, Fortunata was arrested by his expression of pain and irritation.

"I can't understand," he said, "the pleasure

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women take in talking to cripples and deformed children. I call it beastly. People like that boy ought to keep out of sight. I put health before beauty. It is your soundness, your perfection, I like in you."

She was not pleased, but smiled up at him, sure of a perennial charm.

As for his will, it was of iron. Once he was determined, protestations, tears, moved him no more than the wind. In no relationship had Fortunata ever before been the weaker. As for his faults, she came across them constantly—a thick-skinned insensibility, a lack of tact and gentleness that amounted almost to brutality.

Rover was Richard's favorite dog—a prize setter, now old, a venerable and kindly animal. In his visits to the village he had met with misfortune. Some malicious person had thrown scalding water over him. It was sad to see the poor beast, his back one great sore. With time he grew better, the skin healed, but the hair refused to grow. One morning Fortunata, out earlier than usual, came across her husband and the keeper. The men were leaning on their guns, talking together and looking at Rover, who sat gravely between them.

"Dick!" called Fortunata.

Lord Trevers turned and, with his quick, pleasant smile, came to her.

"Go back, Rover!" he said to the dog, who wanted to follow him.

Something in his face made her ask: "What is the matter with Rover?"

He hesitated, then told her: "I have decided to

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have him killed. Oh, he won't suffer; it will be over in a flash."

In Fortunata everything revolted. It seemed to her a brutal crime.

"Oh, Richard, how can you, your old friend?"

"I don't believe in having maimed animals about."

"But he doesn't suffer; he enjoys himself so," she pleaded, with tears in her voice. "Poor dumb beast! If you had seen the way he was looking at you when—just now—to kill him because he isn't pretty any more! Oh, it's wicked!"

"I think it right," Lord Trevers answered, and obstinately refused to meet her eyes.

I cannot make him change, she thought, and a kind of chill passed over her—a premonition of evil.

When the Dowager and the girls heard the story, they set up a turmoil as at the murder of an old friend. Even his mother could not think Richard in the right. The women assailed him with cries of regret and horror. Lord Trevers kept in perfect humor, threw himself into a chair, lolled on his spine and smoked. "You are all talking sentiment, unhealthy bathos. If you women had more experience you would know the world isn't for the weak; the cripples must go to the wall."

"For shame!" cried Fortunata. "If one of us were to go blind, for instance, would you have us killed?"

"That's silly!" cried Richard, always annoyed by a call on his imagination. "Besides, it would be murder. The law wouldn't allow it. But I will tell you one thing: the way of our institutions, our asylums, are run is a disgrace—a blot on England.

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Why, mother, will you believe it, near Birmingham there is an institution for the blind; blind children are brought up there, and intermarry. Think of the race they breed. By Jove! It makes me ill!" He stretched out his long legs, stood up and lounged out.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THIS is a grave, thought Fortunata—a grave where the post comes. How sad to spend one's life with a husband, an old British female and her tiresome daughters!

Yet she let slip no opportunities; she learned to drive tandem, in spite of rain and fog. On horseback she took the highest leaps in the country. She visited the nobility and the gentry about; made a conquest of old Lady Hicklebury. Her Ladyship led Fortunata over the Hicklebury Park and pointed out a labyrinth where, rumor said, King Charles the First had been hid. All such legends Fortunata learned by heart, and told very prettily. Lord Trevers declared that she knew more of Wiltshire than he himself.

Lady Hicklebury, the sun growing affable and showing his face, gave a garden-party in Fortunata's honor. The county people came from every side in chaises and dog-carts, in jolly coaches, and dusty sea-going landaus; all the young ladies of the county were there in lawn dresses that did not disguise their blue elbows. Fortunata was not a little refreshed by the sight of a few, a very few, young men—officers in the Indian service. She was happy, and flirted outrageously.

Lord Trevers strode away from her across the

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lawn—taller and bigger and handsomer than any one else, but very sombre about the brow.

Satisfied, she watched him. He was the cleanest, the best-groomed mortal, with the quick, active grace of a man hardened by physical exercise. He had about him that indescribable look of the world. A tendency to near-sightedness gave him the air of a personage. So satisfied was he with his appearance as to forget it. Fortunata concluded that she might well have found a more repellent husband.

"Who is that lady?" she asked, pointing to a tall woman, who in yards and yards of lace, much overdressed, and burdened with jewels, was traipsing about in the middle of the lawn.

"Violet Gillespie, by Jove!" said one of the officers, putting up his eye-glass.

"Violet is well with the world now, since the Bishop's wife has taken her up."

"Sly little Violet!" laughed the other, in admiration.

"She's giving a ball, I hear, and, mark me, she'll have the very best people."

Fortunata was at once attracted by Mrs. Gillespie, but on nearer inspection thought her splendor a little tarnished. Her diamonds were a trifle yellow, her turquoises a trifle green. In short, the lady herself was a shade off-color. As she drove home with Richard in the dog-cart, followed by the Dowager and her daughters in the victoria, "Why do so many people disapprove of Mrs. Gillespie, Dick?" she inquired.

"She has the worst reputation," replied Richard, gloomily—for to his taste his wife had been over-

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winning with the officers. "She is fast and loud and bad style."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Fortunata, much impressed. "She is going to give a ball."

"Well, she will get none of us," Lord Trevers declared, in a tone that meant "and serve her right, too."

At dinner Fortunata harped on this string. "Mrs. Gillespie does not seem popular, Lady Trevers."

"She's a divorced woman," the Dowager made answer, soup-ladle in hand, fishing sadly in the tureen.

"Oh!" cried Fortunata, interested. She was about to ask more, when her mother-in-law rolled up her eyes in warning, as if to say, "Remember the chaste ears of my daughters!"

"I wonder," hazarded Fortunata, nibbling her bread, like an intelligent squirrel—"I wonder if Mrs. Gillespie will ask us to her ball?"

"That to me is a matter of complete indifference," sternly replied the Dowager. "Our family and that of Colonel Gillespie have been at odds since the time of James the First."

"Time does fly, of course," Fortunata acquiesced, "but that does seem rather far back."

"Should Mrs. Gillespie so far forget herself and her past as to send an invitation to my son's house—Richard, none of us ever have or ever shall pass that woman's threshold."

"There, Fortunata, you hear mother."

Fortunata answered, "Yes, dear," but she could hardly refrain from throwing her chop at him.

In good time the invitations came. Fortunata

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coaxed, she wheedled: "Just for a moment, Dickon dearest! Just to see how they waltz in England—if they all dance as well as you 'do!'"

"You shall not go!" said Dick; and he brought his hand down so heavily on the table that it trembled.

"I shall not go?" repeated Fortunata, in a perplexed voice. Indeed, she was utterly astonished that any one should dare to lay down the law to her. A wave of anger swept over her, so intense that her knees trembled; yet her expression was not changed, for when really moved her features turned mask-like and varied not an atom. Only under her eyes black shadows spread slowly. With head inclined, she stood swaying gently from side to side, like a child repeating a lesson. Under her fair hair she glanced from her husband to his mother with grave, questioning eyes. These singular eyes of hers had in general on poor Richard a magical effect, yet now he did not waver, though a deep brick color flushed his face and forehead. As for the Dowager, she sat primly upright, the corners of her mouth drawn in and wearing the expression of one who in company inadvertently swallows a pickle.

"Fortunata, you understand me," from Dick again, "you shall not go"; and thump—once more the table trembled.

Fortunata said nothing. By her expression one would have judged her profoundly pensive. After a moment she turned and walked away slowly, with head bent, as though lost in deep thought.

It was the date of Colonel Gillespie's ball, and Fortunata thought the country looked more awake

—the trees on the watch, the birds brighter, as though on the lookout for the train of carriages that must pass.

That night at dinner she declared that she felt far from well. She complained of a headache—neuralgia, she thought.

“Like your headaches before we were married?” questioned Lord Trevers, anxiously.

“Somewhat the same. The pain shoots down like this,” drawing her finger along her cheek.

“Perhaps it is a tooth,” suggested Richard.

“Certainly not!” — very coldly, for Fortunata prided herself, and with reason, on her sound, beautiful teeth.

“A face-ache, possibly,” suggested the Dowager.

Fortunata indignantly denied an ailment so plebeian.

“If you will excuse me, Lady Trevers, I will go to my room. Richard, I shall take a little chloral and sleep through the night, and wake cured. If I want anything, I shall ring.”

“Fortunata,” warned the Dowager, in a voice of an ogress, “you are very foolish, very wicked, to take those strong drugs. Try Doctor Powell’s Sleep-giver—homœopathic, harmless, and soothing.”

“You are right, Lady Trevers, as you always are; I will give up my chloral. But to-night let me be weak. Dick, you won’t knock at my door to ask how I am—it would disturb me, dear.”

The pretty little sufferer kissed her relatives good-night tenderly, and went to her room.

“Quick, Hortense,” she cried—“my dress!”

Satin enfolded her. The inestimable Trevers dia-

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monds were sprinkled through her hair like the stars of Ariadne's tiara. She no longer knew herself for the simple girl of the last few months, with her modest dresses and choking collars—for the sweet young wife. Hortense, mysterious as an assassin, went forth to reconnoitre. Fortunata felt some shame at thus conspiring with a servant. The maid delighted in representing Monsieur Milord as a monster of unkindness. She returned, making the boards creak with her cautious feet, and announced in a stage-whisper that the hall was empty.

As Lady Trevers turned to go, she looked back proudly into the glass over her shoulder, as though to say, "England, I defy you to find such another woman!" Noiselessly as a shadow she passed down the stairs, turned the corner, and—there stood her husband! Pale with fright, she fell back against the balustrade; her heart beat a retreat, throbbing like a muffled drum.

"Great heavens, Fortunata, how white you are!" And he went into all manner of exaggerations over her health—she was worse, seriously ill; she must see the doctor. It was that apple-tart.

"I am better. I came to tell you that I am better," she chirped, with the false sprightliness inspired by anxiety and guilt.

"Why have you on these heavy things?" he asked, touching her cloak and the scarf that tied her hair.

"I am cold," she faltered, beginning to shiver. And now, as fate would have it, the groom outside, hearing Lady Trevers's voice, opened the door and announced, "The carriage, my Lady!"

"The carriage? Where are you going?"

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"Where am I going? Where am I going?" repeated Fortunata, with a dreadful blandness. Her haggard gaze ran up the wall to a portrait of a Trevers—a mitred abbot who sat in state in his robes.

"Where are you going at this time of night? Answer me, Fortunata!"

She brought her glance down to his—very limpid, pure, and lovely were her eyes. Her answer was "To the Bishop's."

"To the Bishop's at this hour?"

"Yes; odd time, isn't it?" she agreed, glibly. "But to-morrow he has a conclave, and the next day an appointment at Sarum. There is something I want to ask him—oh, so much, the dear, good man! I must see him, late as it is. I can't wait. Oh, Richard, I have a surprise in store for you—perhaps—perhaps, I can make you very happy."

"My darling, I understand. You want to find what's good in our belief, in mother's and mine. Oh, how glad this will make her! Just to think that you are doing this for me—how you must love me! He put back the sleeve of her coat. He kissed her hand, and wanted to kiss her arm. Fortunata, however, fearing that he might discover how much of her carnal body was displayed for calling on a holy man whose business was with the converting of her soul, pressed her husband's hand tenderly, made a hasty retreat to her carriage, called out "To the Bishop's!" and drew to the door.

The musicians are tuning up, thought she; the flutes are trying their voices; all the company are

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assembled! She was carried past Mrs. Gillespie's house—a train of carriages was in waiting. The Japanese lanterns weighted every tree—exotic, effulgent fruit. All at once, to her own surprise, she let down the window.

“To Colonel Gillespie's!” she commanded.

As Lady Trevers's carriage rolled homeward from the ball, the day was risen. At the blacksmith's forge, across the meadow, the hammers were already clanging and the fire glowed, while on the fields a mist lay sleeping. All that night Fortunata had been madly gay with the joy of wrong-doing—of letting her scruples go with the wind and hazard-ing her future. But now the morrow had dawned, the day of reckoning; in fancy already she met her husband's bewildered face; his questioning assailed her. Her mother-in-law's glum countenance rose before her with dismal upper lip. The enormity of what she had done came over her, and she turned cold.

I must have been mad! she thought.

Indeed, it was incredible that one so calculating, so willing to resign pleasure for self-advancement, should have been led astray by the squeakings of a few fiddles. Accustomed as she was to the hazardous Roman life, where she could never guess what the next morning might hold, she had been stifled, asphyxiated by the monotony of these days. Yet strong as was her love of gayety, it had not prompted her to run this risk. No; it was her vanity this time, as so often before, that had tripped her up. She had wanted to show herself, her young, resplendent self, whose charm had carried off the handsomest,

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the richest, the most gossiped-of man in Wiltshire, a man for whom all the mothers of the county had fought, for whom all the daughters disputed—to show her fine clothes and her curious, foreign beauty.

“I have thrown away the work of two months. The old martINETTE”—thus had she christened the Dowager—“will never forgive me.”

The Contessina, looking uncommonly disconsolate, was driven on, pale as a wraith in the light of the morning, her spirited chin sunk in the folds of her cloak.

The brougham ran for home, and above the trees the towers of Stock-on-Tremp reared their stern angles. Fortunata had left orders for Hortense to open to her the little postern-gate. But Lord Trevers, himself, undid the door. Like a splendid, broad-shouldered young monk, he loomed in his dressing-gown with a tasselled rope around his waist. He did not speak, but led his wife into the house, closed the door, and drew the bolts. In the darkness of the hall she felt his eyes upon her.

He knows! she thought.

“Where have you been?”

“You know; why do you ask me?” she answered, not without spirit.

He took her by the wrist; his hand closed unconsciously about hers like a vise, and as she felt his anger, his resentment, perversely enough she felt that she loved him—almost. He turned to the nearest room. Here, evidently, he had been waiting. The curtains were drawn. There was a lamp on the table, and a magazine. This was a bedroom, long unused and grown musty. On the opposite wall hung an

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allegorical painting—Destruction with a torch flying over a dismal field of carnage. Lord Trevers dropped his wife's hand and stood erect, looking at her. She stepped to the mirror, let the cloak fall from her shoulders, and studied herself intently. Nevertheless, she had a wary eye for her husband.

"You look at yourself in the glass too often," he said, brutally.

She flared up. "I like my face, and I shall look at it when I choose. I am very pretty, or at least very charming."

"Oh, Fortunata, you told me what wasn't true!" The accusation burst from him like a sob.

"Do you accuse me of lying?" she demanded, haughtily.

"You did not go to the Bishop's."

"So you spy on me!"

"It was five o'clock, and you had not yet come home. I went to the Palace. The gates were closed. The lodge-keeper told me you had not passed."

"You were misinformed," declared Fortunata, who could never make a full confession—"the Bishop was from home, at Colonel Gillespie's, if you please; so I went there."

"Oh, Fortunata, why did you—how could you—after all you heard mother say?"

"I am a married woman, and old enough to do as I think fit," she cried, flinging up her chin, arrogantly.

"You are my wife, and never shall do what I or my mother disapprove."

"For twenty-three years, Richard, I have managed to exist without your guidance or that of your admirable mother, and I shall continue to do so."

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"Not while you bear my name."

"Then I don't want your name if I can't do as I like!" she cried, proud as Lucifer.

"My mother does not know of this," said poor Dick, pacing up and down, "and she must not. She will read of it in the papers, of course, and think it a mistake. Some one will speak to her of it, and get well snubbed. No one else will again dare to mention the subject to her. We must keep it from her. I will do everything short of telling a lie. Oh, Fortunata, what a position you have put me in! I must deceive my own mother! If she ever knew, it would break her heart."

He sat down, hunched up, the image of dejection.

She saw that he was hurt, that his case was dangerous. She must fight back to where she had stood with him, or lose his love and her influence forever. Fortunata had early learned the power of words on her husband. A flow of language soothed and convinced him, even when he did not grasp the argument. She now turned upon him and submerged him with her talk. Was it possible, could he believe, that a few wax candles, a few fiddles, were dearer to her than his approval—how he misunderstood her! It pained her to be so misjudged! Yet it was for him, for him only, that she had braved criticism, appeared all alone among aliens and foreigners, hazarding his love for her and that of his dear mother.

Yes, she repeated, it was for him. Well might he look startled and perhaps a little ashamed. Did he ask why? She would tell him. Lady Hickelbury, she knew, represented a powerful faction;

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Mrs. Gillespie was her *protégée*; many of the best people frequented the Colonel's house; the Bishop was his friend. Suppose, then, that all Stock-on-Tremp refused the invitation, what a slight was implied! What open criticism of those who accepted! This was a bad beginning for Lord and Lady Trevers. They were thereby merely laying up unpopularity for themselves.

"I have often told mother," said Dick, looking at Fortunata with more familiar eyes, "that her prejudices were—"

"I will not hear a word of criticism of your mother, Richard!" interrupted Fortunata. "I said to myself," she continued, "I shall not get permission to go, but go I must, for my Dick's sake. I worship truth; but in his cause no scruples shall hinder me. I accounted for your non-appearance; I told Mrs. Gillespie you were taken suddenly ill."

"What disease did I have?" asked Richard, with awe.

"Quinsy."

"What is that?" he questioned, with growing admiration.

"I don't know," she admitted. "No, Richard, my judgment may have been at fault; but no selfish love of pleasure prompted me. My thought was of you, and you only. The end justified the means." She came across to him and, sitting down at his feet, crossed her hands and rested them on his knees. The lamp was burning out, and in the uncertain light her face had an illusive charm—the singular pallor that had always enchanted him.

"I understand your motives," Lord Trevers fal-

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tered, "and, of course, you did not tell me a direct falsehood—"

"Richard," she said, "if I thought it would help you—if I thought it was for your good—I would tell a thousand lies—don't you know it, Richard?"

"I don't know anything!" he groaned, feeling his anger escaping him. "I love you—that is all I know."

"There is no sacrifice I would not make for you. My husband, look at me and you will believe me." A tender, mysterious smile illuminated her face.

He looked at her, and tears actually came into his eyes. He put his arms about her, kissed her. "Forgive me!" he said, humbled. "What you do is for the best, always."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE obstinate barometer, despite Plutonian blackness, pointed still to "Fair." In the shadow of the hall the wet ulsters drooped like wraiths. The girls, bored with putting off and on their galoshes, brooded over the hearth, their wet feet in the grate.

"Dearest Aunt Colibri," wrote Fortunata, "everything is so damp and sticky, I am bored to death. Is no one of my family dead or dying? Is it not very urgent that I should come home?"

Five days later, "Wake up, little one!" shouted Dick, plunging his head into Fortunata's room at the eerie hour of seven in the morning.

"Is that you, Sunbeam?"

"I have just come from the stables."

"So I might have suspected."

"There is a telegram for you."

"Oh!" cried Fortunata, both hands on her heart, "I feel a sense of foreboding, something tells me—"

"Well, read and find out."

"No, read it yourself, dear; I haven't the courage."

Dick read:

"Tonsillitis set in and pleurisy feared. Come immediately.

PRUDENZIA COLIBRI."

"There, didn't I tell you so!" she cried.

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"Have you suffered much, dear Aunt?" asked Fortunata, who, with her husband, had just reached Rome and come direct to inquire after the Princess.

"I am better now," said the Princess, with a sepulchral cough. "Where are you staying, Lord Trevers?"

"We think of the Grand Hotel!"

"A horrid hole! Your apartment, I suppose, isn't ready? Come to me till then, and the business details we can discuss later."

But the Contessina felt a distaste for the disreputable home of her childhood.

"Our Italian cooking doesn't agree with Richard, Zia," she said. She was beginning to find Richard useful—and Lord and Lady Trevers went elsewhere.

Fortunata felt some apprehension at thought of her future home in the Via Vente Settembre, yet in the physical sense, at least, it was the most charming of homes—the panelled walls, the broad window-sills, the hospitable chairs and deep divans seemed to tell of the intimate life of a man and woman. She regretted that she could not love Dick more. His lack of humor—of humor as she understood it—was a trial to her. She herself was alive always to the ridiculous. She would glance at him for sympathy, and there he sat looking over the top of his collar, as glum as an ogre. She once asked him, "Do you ever laugh?"

He answered, "Yes, I laugh often; I am very fond of jokes."

His wife, Lord Trevers intended, should wait on him by inches, but Fortunata was not that kind of a Griselda. She, too, had done a little tyrannizing

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—to love her meant to suffer and to work for her. She broke him in, till he fetched and carried for her like a dog. It was pitiful to see this six-foot mass of conceit grown so humble. He told her, "It makes me so happy to wait on you—" And she answered, "Your life, then, will be one stretch of sunshine, dearest."

Before marriage, Richard had settled in his mind the sort of clothes his wife should wear—tweed frocks, low-heeled boots, a modest *coiffure*—a severe style, unlike Fortunata's frivolous *chic*. He showed an obstinate dislike to certain colors and a predilection for blue of a washed-out shade, and hateful to Fortunata. She managed him adroitly with her talk and cheerfulness, as one guides a stubborn horse who balks a fence. He found fault with her extravagance, and rightly. She sucked up money as a leech does blood.

Richard marvelled at his wife's vanity, yet she might have pointed out the same faults in him. The large complacence, however, with which Lord Trevers regarded himself was beyond vanity. His was the pride of the male, the pride that makes the peacock strut and outshine its mate. He passed hours at his tailor's, and was as earnest over his toilettes as any fading belle of sixty. In his dressing-room stood a forest of boot-trees. He had ties and waistcoats multicolored. His coats hung from forms on the walls so that in the dusk it was uncanny to see them. At every chance he showed Fortunata his clothes; discussed them, wondered if they became him, with a simplicity that was disarming.

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She had once asked why he shaved his mustache. "Let it grow; it gives a man such a brave look." He answered, "My mouth is rather nice, and a mustache would hide it."

His lips, indeed, were firm and well shaped; his white teeth like genial tombstones; his chin square. He knew his points, it seemed.

After a week their apartment was ready. Their home stood open for them, and Fortunata found that in her heart, although she had never known it, she had been longing all her life long for some walls to call her own.

She was an excellent housekeeper, neat and methodical, talented in her management of servants. Only in this, as in everything else, her shiftlessness in money matters was apparent. Lord Trevers, though far from mean, had a correct estimate of money. He took her to task.

"Italians throw money away. It is a Continental fault," he told her, seriously. "It's in your blood; your father was a spendthrift."

To which Fortunata answered, "All my life long, Richard, I have done what I chose and had what I wanted, and quarrelled with no one."

The season was in full swing, the air full of a feverish gayety. Fortunata piloted her husband through dinners, balls, *festas*. She spurred him on to his duties as a diplomat. It was remarked by the world that Trevers was unstiffening, was thawing out, was becoming civilized almost. Fortunata worked strenuously to keep him afloat. Her nature craved occupation. His career gave her life a meaning—his success was her aim. He made a

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break, and she filled up the breach. She heard him boring some one, and she took him off. She was indefatigable, and steadily she pushed him ahead. Already for herself she perceived an enviable middle age—her husband ambassador and under her thumb. Thus Lady Trevers would have all England in her hands. Patiently, courageously, intelligently, she worked to make for herself a place in the world. There was no youth too green but she could look into his eyes and smile; no professor too pedantic but with flashing looks she could discuss with him fossils and Roman ruins; no old lady too deaf but she bent, entranced, over the ear-trumpet.

Curiously enough, as Fortunata worked for Dick and for herself, as she strove to fire him with her own ability and ambition, as she was brought to observe his slow-working, commonplace brain, she felt her heart change toward him, and feeling his dependence, grew fond of him. In some ways he was her superior; she knew it, and from this fact she drew a certain pleasure. If she had the better brain, he had the better heart. He was earnest where she was light; truthful where she was false; faithful where she was capricious and unstable. She was proud of his beauty, of his physical strength, she liked his fondness for clothes, his well-groomed, cleanly, masculine aspect. They were happy together, laughing across their little dinner-table, the candles and a bowl of flowers keeping their whispering heads apart. To him everything she said was witty, everything she did was right; in his eyes she was the most beautiful woman and the nearest to perfection in the world. Certain minute

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defects in her, such as a perverted taste for clothes of a racy order, her delight in spending money, were in his mind merely amiable caprices that sufficed to make her adorably human. If at certain moments the old thought persisted in cropping up that she had deceived him, stolen off against his will to the ball of a notorious woman, he gave his obsession vent, questioned her over again, always hoping for an answer that might lay the ghost of his unrest. She never lost patience, but listened with attention, lied to him with the politeness that seemed inbred. In time he asked less and less often, and she began to hope that he was free of his monomania.

CHAPTER XXX

ONE day they had a quarrel—a real quarrel. It was in the evening. The Austrian ambassador was holding an official reception. The diplomats were to attend in full regalia. Dick came to Fortunata's room to show himself off, as vainglorious as a débutante before her first ball. He wore his splendid uniform, his great chest tattooed with orders and ribbons and medals. He put his hand on the hilt of his sword and looked toward his wife, with conscious pride. He was not a little pleased with himself. Fortunata, standing before the glass, encircling her throat with a string of pearls, cried, "You're beautiful, Dick; word of honor!"

"This uniform doesn't look half bad on me," he agreed. "Are you entirely dressed?" he suddenly asked, arrested by his wife's costume.

"Yes."

"Dressed completely?" he repeated.

"This," said Fortunata, pointing toward her sheath skirt, "is the Directoire fashion."

"Beastly fashion, I call it."

"I hope the ballroom is in the basement," Fortunata admitted, turning round and shimmering in her serpentine splendor. "I don't know how I shall step up the stairs."

"And is that all your own hair?" asked Richard,

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more and more mystified by his wife's aspect. "That great bunch on the back of your head?"

"Of course not. What a silly question!"

"I have always said that my wife should not wear false hair. It's dirty; it's unwholesome—whose head has that come off of—you don't know. I have heard my mother say it heats the scalp."

"Your mother would look better in a lock or two," Fortunata exclaimed, now thoroughly annoyed. "Better than in those snuffy bathing caps she wears. Talk about the unreasonableness of women; men are annoying. 'I want my wife,' they say, 'to have a smartly dressed head, but she sha'n't wear a switch, or a rat, or a strand of false hair. My wife must be the smartest woman in the room. Her gown has to be stunning, and it shall cost her five hundred *lire* only.'"

"I like simple things," Richard declared; "a pretty muslin frock looks better to me than all that giddy twinkling stuff."

"A pretty fiddlestick!" cried Fortunata, losing all patience. "My poor husband, you deceive yourself. You have a quantity of ideas that you accept from your mother all ready-made, and try to pass them off as your own."

"If I must get my ideas ready-made, I could choose them from no one better."

"You'll take them from me after a while," said Fortunata boastfully. "You'll believe me in time."

"I always listen to what you say," he answered. "I do believe in you, although I do know of once when you deceived me."

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"Are you referring to that Gillespie world-without-end?"

"Yes."

"I'm so angry with you," Fortunata declared, "that I am tempted to stay at home, and let you go to the Embassy alone and dish yourself."

"You cannot come with me in that dress. It is not decent."

She saw that he was in earnest. By degrees she must educate him to the style. She never struggled against the inevitable, so she came to him and said, "Richard, you know I only dress to please you. I will change my gown." And she smiled at him with the charm of expression that was hers. By this move she bewitched him more than ever, had it been possible.

For the first time Fortunata had been made to do something against her will, and she was conscious of an acute pleasure. She had met her master. She revelled in the consciousness of a force superior to her own.

Eugenio came to call sometimes, still talking of La Vallière. Sometimes Antonia came; sometimes Luigi. Lord Trevers glumly received the latter. "He's a braggart and a cad," Richard would say, and Don Luigi learned that for one woman, at least, he was not irresistible. Poor Francesca, who was of so little account at home, found a heaven in Via Vente Settembre. To this neglected child Fortunata had generally been kind. Now she fed her, made her presents, listened to her talk. Lord Trevers was Francesca's friend, and in this atmosphere of shelter, of sympathy, the child bloomed,

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told the secrets, the events of her desolate life, and felt that she was at last one among human beings. As for Antonia, she made Lady Trevers's sitting-room her confessional. Dick had a distrust of her, and at the sound of her summons, a distracted pealing of the *loggia* bell, he left the house, bowing to her sombrely as they passed on the stairs. Antonia's visits were long and lamentable—it seemed that Luigi was falling away from her. "Ah!" she would say, "it is inevitable. *E il destino*. There is always one who loves the most. One kisses, and the other takes the kiss!" And in turbulent sorrow she would take herself off, flightily forgetting her gloves or her purse, or a treasured note of Luigi's which she had brought for Fortunata to peruse.

"Does the Colibri ever speak of your letters?" Fortunata once asked her.

Antonia held out her arms, as though about to be crucified. "My poor letters!" she cried. "I shall never see them again!"

"I am not so sure," said Fortunata. "I am very uneasy. As for me, the Madonna be thanked, I am through with the Colibri forever! Yesterday I paid her the last of the money I owed her."

It was true. By pilfering from the sum given her for clothes and the household expenses, Fortunata had discharged her debt of ten thousand eight hundred *lire* to the Princess, together with its subsequent interest. Very naturally, she had never told Richard the discreditable story. She could picture his amazement, his horror.

"You know, Antonia, she made me sign an agreement. She wouldn't give me back the paper,

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though. She swore that she'd torn it up. Somehow, I don't believe her, and I can't help feeling anxious. I wish I'd made her give me a receipt. I'll make her write me an acknowledgment the next time I see her."

It would, indeed, have been a wise precaution, but Fortunata, distracted by thousands of interests, forgot the unhappy business.

The sun looked in all day on Richard and Fortunata in their home. Canaries sang in the windows, flowers bloomed on every table. They had plenty of money, many friends; they were flattered, spoiled, made much of. So busy were they amusing themselves that they had no time to think. The winter passed like an enchanted dream. Spring came, with the promise of travel, of strange countries, of new faces.

"Where shall we go, Fortunata?" Richard asked, one evening, as they walked home through the sultry streets from the Circolodi Tennis. He strode on beside her in his white flannels, holding the rackets in his tanned hands. "To England—to Stock-on-Tremp?"

In fancy, a stern old face rose up before Fortunata, bristling with teeth.

"No," she said; "some place where you and I can be alone."

"I think so, too," he agreed, with a heartiness that refreshed her.

They had come into the house, exquisitely thirsty, and in the sitting-room were taking lemonade through straws. The blinds were down to keep out the violence of the heat; the canaries twittered

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one bar over and over again, as though striving to learn a refrain. Richard had taken up a map and was studying it. "What do you say to Perugia, Fortunata? It's a dull hole, but I should like it," he said, looking at her.

"So should I," she answered; and she was surprised at her reply. Perugia, a sun-baked town, lost among the hills: that meant that she would not see a man she knew; that Dick would walk her over the hills, their two shadows side by side, unenlivened by a third. Yet the prospect did not frighten her; she told herself that it was for a few months only, and would prove a rest-cure. To Rome she would return, refreshed, rejuvenated, her wits sharpened, ready to spur on Richard to a higher post. Italian in all her viewpoints, she had meant after her marriage to be the most talked-of woman in Rome. She was not going very fast about her business. Somehow, she found it harder to flirt. She began almost to be afraid lest she might be degenerating into a dull matron occupied with domesticity, with housekeeping. At times she caught herself quoting Dick—appalling discovery! She had always scorned these dutiful and doting wives.

The house which they took was among the hills, not far from Perugia, close to a stream. Goats sprang upon the rocks, and the brown shepherds came after, playing the flute and the pipes—a melancholy trill, a trifle flat, reiterated until it gained the heart and filled the listener with the mystic, throbbing wonder of the South. The sun seemed greedy, trying to dry up all the rocks; the lizards, stealthy of purpose, glistening with blue and

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green, shot through the crevices like evil genii. The *edera pungente* and other rampart plants spread out their dusty, wicked leaves, and at every *contadino's* window flourished the brutal red geranium. At night nature relaxed, weary of engendering, weary of the ardor of the sun. The moon rose in the sky, seeming frail and virginal after the furies of the day. Down in the well of the hills lay Perugia—a light here, a light there, studded with sparks, it shone like a lower heaven.

Certainly, Richard was not entertaining. He was anything but witty. His enemies might have called him dull; still, it is a doubtful joy to be always in the company of genius; and Lord Trevers possessed one quality, rare in a person of will—he was pleasant to live with. Then, again, he was as handsome as a god; and Fortunata, like many women, had an exaggerated worship of the beautiful.

She rode like a fury to keep up with him. The horses ran abreast along the Umbrian Plains, their hoofs waking sparks on the dry Perugian roads. The *contadini* passed, flowers behind their ears. "Buon Viaggio! Buona Cavalcata!" shouted they.

For the time she had given up all her false hair; she took to low heels.

"You look ripping, Fortunata!" cried her husband. "Those are the clothes you ought to wear always. You're getting a jolly color like my sisters."

Could it be, then, that her carefully acquired charm was lost—the exotic charm of the lotus? Had she degenerated into the blousy cabbage-rose, and rather a brown rose, alas! With a stab at the

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heart, she marked a tracery of freckles—fine but undeniable—across the bridge of her nose. She was appalled; her conscience was shocked as at a deterioration of character.

In the evenings the two sat, side by side, at the gate of the house looking across the valley, happy with exercise, with fresh air. In the growing confidence, the tenderness that dusk inspires, they talked of their future and of the happiness they meant to find in life. The air was still. Slender, dishevelled, the willows soared up like enchanted dryads, bewitched while dancing. The muleteers drove home cracking their whips—"Aye, aye, avanti!" Far off, down in the pit of the hills, rang the bells of Perugia—far off, a breath of sound so faint, so elusive, that one seemed to divine rather than to hear it.

It was a night in August, the *collazione* was over. Richard lounged out to the gate, a stocky pipe held between his white teeth; he sat down by Fortunata's side. Chin in hands, she was looking out across the chasms like a young sphinx. For the last week she had not been well. She had been aware of a ringing in her ears, a sense of giddiness and pains across the back of her head.

"Dick, the bells aren't ringing to-night," she said; "why is that?"

"Perhaps it isn't a festa." Suddenly he lifted his hand. "Listen! there they go." She heard nothing. She listened again. "Why, no—" she hesitated. He turned to her in triumph.

"Your ears aren't as sharp as mine. You don't

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suppose, Fortunata, you will have any trouble like your mother's, eh?"

She looked at him with her dark, long-lashed eyes, to which one never seemed to grow accustomed. Incredulity was the dominant note of her expression.

She had always had faith in her Providence. She was too unusual, she thought, not to be protected. Also, she was piqued that Richard could think her capable of so unattractive an ailment as deafness. It could not be—yet all summer she never heard the bells again. She was preoccupied, obsessed, and the beauty of the nights was lost to her. She kept a watch on herself. Did she miss what others heard? It seemed to her—or was it an idea?—that the finer noises, the rustle of the leaves, the fall of the rain, all the subtleties of sound escaped her. Deep down in her heart something stirred—a foreboding, and a chill of more than Death came over her. Not even to herself did she admit her fear; but where she went there it was—fear enveloped her like a mist. It blotted out the glory of the Perugian summer.

To herself Fortunata said, "God is good, every one says so"; and she prayed him to keep her and the few she loved from death and all that is evil.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY were at home again. The butler, beaming welcome, threw open the door. Fortunata stood on the threshold, her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Oh, Dick!" she said, "how I have grown to love that lozenge wall-paper your mother chose. And the table-cloth, I adore it!" She flung her arms out. "All sun," she cried, "like the rooms that mother dreams of, with a southern exposure on every side."

Debt, like the sword of Damocles, had hung over her head all her girlhood. The walls of the Palazzo Colibri had seemed to shelter her under protest. Now she need no longer be ashamed or afraid. Here in the face of all men was her home; it belonged to her; it was hers to alter, to take care of; here she might gather together the things that were dear to her, and here she meant to be happy.

Society still allured her. She plunged into balls and dinners, albeit with something less than the old fervor. It was harder for her to grasp the jerky, disconnected sentences. Sometimes others laughed when she had not caught the joke, and she had such a horror of seeming dull!

"I am less of a liar," she thought, "than I used to be." Nevertheless, the lies of the past kept tripping her up.

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One evening she and Richard were riding in the Borghese Gardens. She was almost happy, and felt as though she were closer, dearer to him. Suddenly a woman appeared, on horseback, galloping toward them. By the excessive dwindling of the waist, Fortunata recognized Pearl. Miss Case came cavorting up, laughing, the scarf of her hat fluttering out behind her. She shouldered her whip in a military salute. Her manner was a jeer.

"Good-morning, Lord Trevers!" she said, ignoring Fortunata.

Lord Trevers bowed with a petrified face. He disliked Miss Case. "You have met my wife, I think."

"Oh, Dick, how can you!" reproved Fortunata. "You've spoiled everything; we were cutting each other."

Miss Case gave a nasty smile. "I have known your wife longer than you yourself have, Lord Trevers. What funny times we've had together!" She started in to tell of their mutual adventures. She did it artfully, placing Fortunata in the worst light, although never once uttering a hard word. She brought out the Contessina's flirtations, her scandalous gayety, even while she seemed to praise. The wind was high; Fortunata could not hear; nevertheless, she scented danger. She rode up to Lord Trevers and put her hand in his, although even when alone with Richard she rarely offered him a caress. Now she gave him a glance, warm and shy, that spoke of intimacy and happiness.

Miss Case wheeled, made her horse prance and cavort, then plunged away at a gallop, showing off

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her figure, so shapely as to be almost indecent. Lord Trevers looked after her with elaborate indifference.

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's jealous."

"Yes, of course; but why?"

"We came out the same year and always interfered. She was in love with a man to whom I was—well, yes, engaged—Guasconte, you know."

"Ah, then, that's true?"

"Yes; and afterward she wanted to marry Eugenio, but I wouldn't let her."

"What, she cared for him?"

"She got over it. She was crazy about you next."

"She is jealous, then, I dare say."

Did he forget the innuendoes, the hints of sly meetings and thievish kisses—de Brillac and all the others? Fortunata never knew. Once, some time after, he said, "It's queer to think how many men you nearly married."

The phrase was unlike him—it savored of Miss Case's persiflage.

Again one night, Lord and Lady Trevers were leaving the Costanzi Theatre. In the street the crowd was calling for their carriages. Catching sight of his, Richard hurried Fortunata toward it, but suddenly came up against an old gentleman sidling crab-wise along the curb. Fortunata's heart bumped. It was Prince Raoul de la Tour Bichelle! He turned grayer, drew off his hat, and bowed. His manner touched her, so humble was it and forlorn. Dick helped her into the coupé, then turned to gaze

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after the Frenchman with the cold curiosity of youth. Stepping into the carriage, he swung to the door.

"By Jove! That old ape will outlive us all! Tell me one thing!" His face clouded over with the look she had grown to dread. "How in God's name could you think of marrying him?"

It was neither just nor logical to bring up her former mistakes. Before their marriage he had known of them—he should, then, either have forgotten Fortunata or forgotten certain episodes in her life. But the Gillespie incident seemed to have brought her past more clearly and vitally before him. Once a man of Richard's nature is possessed with an idea, it holds him till death. He was too proud to question; he rarely asked for explanations, yet too often Fortunata caught him looking at her, his brows drawn in mute appeal, his eye searching her, as though trying to read her soul; for he loved her, still loved her entirely, and she had failed him. For the first time Fortunata perceived the uselessness of words. To say, I am sorry, I'll begin over again—how unprofitable! To explain, to confess—as well let the wind blow. After all, she and her husband were strangers. They had been shone on by different suns; they spoke different languages; they must ask less one of the other. Nevertheless, they got on genially, like people who long ago have given up trying to make a good impression on each other.

One night at dinner she was conscious of his eyes fixed on her as though to read her thoughts. When the butler had brought the coffee and was gone, Fortunata saw Richard straighten himself, fling

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back his head, and look at her intently. He is going to speak now, she thought. She watched his lips, and sharpened every nerve to hear him. Sure enough, he leaned across the table and said to her:

"Fortunata, I want to ask you something."

"Yes?" she answered, laying down the cherry she held.

"It's none of my business, I know, but the thing's got in my head. An idea gets hold of a man sometimes, and he can't shake it off. Tell me how you could ever think of marrying that old Frenchman—Bichette, or whatever his name is."

She listened to him patiently, and excused herself as best she could. "All my relatives, my friends, thought it was a good match. I could have helped them. They advised me—he is very rich—you know."

"But that would be marrying for money!" he cried, as though it were an unheard-of thing.

"One must live," she answered, soberly. "A woman, Dick, doesn't earn her livelihood; marriage is her only career."

"I can't believe that you would do such a thing. You would never sell yourself!"

"That's not a new point of view. One must bargain to keep alive. One gets nothing without paying."

He looked at her as though she were some strange monster. "I can't understand you," he said, bitterly.

She was conscious of having made an awkward answer. It seemed that to Richard she was always lacking in tact. Her want of diplomacy came possibly from her new-born desire to be sincere. She started in to defend herself, then suddenly saddened and hung her head.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT was no use; she could no longer deceive herself. She must accept the fact that she had ceased to hear as she was born to hear. She was growing deaf. She had known it for several months, and had not dared to give shape to her thought. If she faced so frightful a possibility, she was lost. She remembered to have heard her mother say that this infirmity had come upon her as a young woman, when life still held every promise.

"My God!" was now Fortunata's constant thought, "I know that you won't desert me like this! I was born to be happy." Yet in her heart was a voice telling her to get together all her endurance, all her courage. She was strangely secretive, had always borne her own burdens.

The winter went by, yet she could not bring herself to go to the doctor—she was afraid. One night she had a dream. She was in a room full of people. They were all laughing, talking together, or, rather, their lips moved and she heard nothing. Antonia was there, and Eugenio and Richard. They did not seem to know her. They looked through and walked past her, as though she were already dead and forgotten. To be so cut off inspired her with such loneliness that she awoke sobbing. She sat up in bed, cold with dread, her heart beating in her

throat. The darkness was opaque, heavy, crushing. "I'm going deaf!" she said, aloud. She was as certain as though God himself had told her. She lit the light by her bed, took the address-book on her knees, and looked down the line of doctors. She shivered in her thin nightgown; her hands trembled; her throat was dry, as though she were dying. Doctor Durini, Via Nazionale 58, Ear and Throat Specialist. A repulsive name! She could sleep no more, and sat up in bed the rest of the night until the east was streaked with red. The servants were moving about the house—she knew it, rather than heard it—and the heavy, muffled footsteps seemed treading on her heart.

She breakfasted in her room, as usual, and went out without seeing Richard. The victoria in which she sat bounded lightly along. The fresh air brushed past. The motion soothed her, and she almost forgot the nightmares of the night. It was the feast of San Pancrazio. Bands of music were out marching, of monks, of cantori. The contadini trooped from the villages, their mules gay with ribbons and bells. There was such a prodigality of sun, in the streets such pyramids of flowers and fruits, such radiance, such a dome of blue sky, as to put to shame a Veronese. In passing the Church of Gesù, Fortunata saw the priests entering, with bowed heads, in sacramental robes as flaming as the fiery angels.

After the examination, "Of course it isn't serious, Doctor?" she said, brightly, as if to ward off a frightful answer.

"There is deafness in your family?" he asked, as he polished a lens.

"Yes, my mother."

"Ah!" He looked at her, and her heart contracted. "Sit down, Signora."

It seemed the trouble was hereditary, and she could not escape it. He talked of "the middle ear," "the absence of tympanic disease." "The conditions of sound may be good," he said, "but the perception of sound may be faulty. A nervous affection is apt to follow shocks, and is often hereditary."

She looked at him as at an executioner. "Why, this means that I am done for!" she stammered; "I might as well be dead."

He went on to tell her the nature of the disease; its rapid progress; the resultant destruction of the ear-drum. She stretched out her hands to him.

"Ah, what's the use!" she cried. But he did not spare her. He was at his work diagnosing, summing up her faint chances. She looked down at her hands, clasped in her lap. They seemed to her pitiful in their dapper dogskin gloves. She was overcome with pity, not so much for herself as for everything that hopes. She had worked so hard to be happy, and was come to this! The affirmation, she thought, of so horrible a calamity must wither the features and change the look in the eyes.

When again safe at home, she drew her chair before the glass to study the ravages in her face, yet found herself much as usual. All at once, quite suddenly, she began to weep. Cruel sobs shook her as though they must wrench her to pieces. She leaned her head on her arm and rolled it from side to side, moaning, "Anything but this! Anything but this!"

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Other calamities she might have accepted without a murmur. To figure as a heroine would have recompensed her for all suffering. An imaginary wasting away with heart-disease had always appealed to her. Even consumption one may endure without a loss of dignity; one may admit it without shame. On a divan one may flicker elegantly away holding a lace handkerchief to the lips, all the life of the body accumulated in the exaggerated eyes. Blindness is a classic calamity—large, overwhelming, sublime. Even the unimaginative feel the horror of an eternal night! But to the existence of the deaf the world is pitiless—what excuse is there for the hard of hearing, the bawled at? To be handicapped by so sordid an affliction is like being run over by a wheelbarrow or blinded by the explosion of a bottle of ginger-ale, a calamity without a touch of the sublime.

To know, to feel, to watch the failing, the decomposition of something essential to happiness; to be given over to these futile sounds in the ears, to these roarings of a cataract, to these chirpings as of a crazy aviary, to these cracks like the creakings of furniture in haunted houses; to have these silly noises shut out of the world, and in the end to be encompassed by a relentless stillness; to lose the glories of music, of stringed instruments and the organ, the genial sounds of the city, the rush of the winds, the roar of the river—all the melodies of earth. Never to hear a human voice normally again, nor the voices of little children. Never to interchange ideas, being to being. What loneliness! What a cutting off! What an exile! As well be en-

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cased in the six boards of a coffin, an apprentice to the grave—where, too, there is no sound. When the heart knows such bitterness, why will it not give up its industrious beating?

Fortunata thought of Rover, the dog at Stock-on-Tremp, and she grew sick at heart.

One morning, as Fortunata awoke, the sun was looking in at her. The foliage of the square was moving in the breeze, and she thought, The world is too beautiful when you live alone with the creature you love. This life is killing me!

And to Richard she said: "Let's try the Palazzo Colibri—only for a week, a few days. Think how Aunt Prudenzia will snap at the board!" He protested. "It is a den of iniquity," admitted Fortunata. "I can't see why I like it. I was never happy there. It must be in the blood!"

Her word with him was law, and thither they went.

The Colibri and her household were at luncheon, eating macaroni off the chipped Sèvres that Fortunata had known in her happy, disreputable days.

Shaking hands with these people, she had a sense of inexpressible sadness, finality—as though saying good-bye to them forever. In the house that had known her without a heart, without a conscience, she hoped to lose the ache at her heart, to be free of horror and the pains of love. "You are growing deaf," said the specialists. "You are growing deaf," said the greatest doctors of the country, and she crept off to see them, guiltily, secretly, as to a love-tryst.

Fortunata had been taught that a woman's duty,

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before giving alms, or speaking the truth, or living in honor, was to be elegant and agreeable and charming, and now—! She must fall out of the ranks of the women famous for their wit, for their charm. The deaf are rarely attractive—suspicious often, either boring or insignificant. And she had so loved admiration! What shall I now live for? she asked herself—to eat three meals a day, to sleep nine or ten hours, and be comfortable. Great God! one has time enough in the grave to be comfortable.

Then, again, she had days of hope, a sickly thrilling hope. It whispered that this was a nightmare which would pass and she would wake safe and sound. She took to praying, urging God to strike a bargain with her—promising a change of heart if he would save her. For the first time she realized the sorrow, the pain there is in the world, and she was seized with pity, not only for herself, but for all humanity.

But she had her moments of revolt also. Her soul asked: Why am I hurt? Why am I ruined? Why I more than another? There was Antonia living in sin, and no ill came upon her. There was the Princess, always intent on evil-doing, and harm passed her by. Luigi and Guido led loose lives, yet they were never punished. If God lived, He was not just! But immediately she was afraid of her blasphemy, fearful of more calamity, and fawned on her knees. She could not sleep. She took to trional, vironal, and finally to chloral to break up the horrors of insomnia, yet her face, curiously enough, showed little change. No one guessed her secret, guarded with such jealousy. As yet her in-

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firmity was not pronounced. If she was spoken to and did not answer, her silence was put down to absence of mind or preoccupation. If she misunderstood, she was quick to remedy her mistake. Richard thought her more silent than of old, less quick to catch one up, more respectful to others' opinions, and he liked her the better for the change.

She lived at his side, in her heart the torment of the damned, and he thought her happy. Why not? She smiled like other people. To any one who had known her, it was pitiful to see how humble she was grown with him, how anxious to please. Her heart told her she was losing him. With terror she realized that her indifference had been her power to attract.

At times he tried to tell her what she was to him, repeating himself, short of words—yet through his labored talk pierced a regret for his heart's former emptiness, for that easy indifference, rather than these pains of love.

Strange that never a presentiment had stirred her, never a whisper of coming evil chilled her. The thing that kills comes like that. One turns a corner, and there it is, full-grown at the birth, a monster horror. She had seen this infirmity gaining on her mother; its name had come lightly from her mouth; but never had she thought of the curses of heredity. Others had so loved her, making smooth her life, that she imagined that God himself, who had made her, finding her more charming than his other beings, had kept her for a particular and personal affection, warding off from her the evil to which the flesh is heir.

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The summer was come. Rome lay inert, exhausted by the ardor of the sun. Antonia and Fortunata sat side by side in the Palazzo garden in the shadow of the cypress.

"Sorella mia," said the Marchesa, "give a little smile. I hear from Lord Bolton that Ricardo is to be promoted."

Fortunata watched her sister's lips.

"Ah, Antonia, that's it. I had hoped so much for the future. Dick's a new man as to his career. He has grown ambitious, desirous to succeed. We might have been so happy. Oh, God!"

"Why do you say, 'Oh, God?'"

"I don't know."

"But I know. My little sister, you are unhappy. Something is eating out your heart. Tell me what it is."

In this sudden glow of affection that had drawn the sisters closer together, Fortunata was tempted to confess her miserable secret, in these pitying arms, however incompetent, to seek a momentary refuge from her sufferings.

The habit of a lifetime—to keep silent on that which concerned her most—made it hard for her to speak.

"Fortunata, I love you dearly. Tell me!"

But in the momentary hesitation the impulse was gone. The dusk came down like a veil, sweet and damp. The Marchesa passed from the garden. Fortunata remained on into the evening, among the whispers of the night. When, finally, she passed through the dining-room, at the table there was no one save Eugenio, who, before the half-empty wine

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glasses and crumpled napkins, sat with his head on his hands. At sight of his sister, he sighed like a furnace and let his head sink into his arms.

"Are you ill?" asked Fortunata.

"No."

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, Fortunata, I shall never be free again! I shall never be as I used to be. I am lost!"

"You haven't that ancient La Vallière still on the brain—I should say, on the heart?"

"On the heart, yes. My heart is sore—physically sore—as though it were rough round the edges. The thought of her has become an obsession."

"But, Eugenio, really she isn't pretty; she has a long, pasty face. She looks like a powdered dromedary."

"Ah, but did you ever see her smile, Fortunata? Have you ever noticed what peculiar eyes she has? Even if she were as ugly as a toad, she would be more fatal to me than another Venus. There is no one like her; everything she says and does she makes her own."

By watching her brother's lips Fortunata had understood him to some extent. Her thoughts had gone back to their treadmill. After all, thought she, Eugenio's sorrow is more decent, more becoming than mine. And her eyes filled with tears, for she was always much affected by herself as an object of pity.

On retiring that night, Fortunata opened an unused drawer of her bureau and found a forgotten possession—a pistol that had been her father's. It was prettily wrought of black steel, with an open-

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work handle like lace. It lay there ominous, funereal. She lifted out the revolver and held it in her hands; she looked at the death-giving trigger, and drew her finger down the cold and fatal barrel. Such a trembling seized her that, as she put the pistol into the drawer, the crazy old bureau rattled under her touch.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IT was Guido's birthday, or, rather, the birthday of the saint after whom he was named, for Guido had had a saint for a godfather, incredible though it may seem.

It was a dreary night, the rain fell slantwise. In the streets the wind walked alone. The dinner-table was cleared, and books, papers, and embroideries brought out. An attack of despair had seized Fortunata. She left the room, and from the hall window looked out into the night. The shrubs of the garden writhed and tossed their mad arms. Meanwhile, the Princess, as was the custom at this hour, had retired to exchange her furbelows for a dressing-gown, to shed her debonair curls and draw down over her bristly gray head a skull-cap. After her Excellency had laid aside her daily glories for this severer costume, preparatory for bed, she was supposed to be invisible—that is, etiquette required that her relatives ignore her presence. They must neither speak with her nor rise at her entering the room, nor offer her the attention due a woman of her rank and age. Had she seen fit to shoot off a blunderbuss in the midst of them, no one would have dared to dodge.

To-night, at the customary hour, Nello, candle in hand, drew the portières and ushered in the

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Princess. Her ermine dressing-gown, stained yellow with age, she held muffled about her up to the jaws. Her sinister cap was drawn down to her brows, and her big white face wore an evil look. Forgetting that she was invisible, she beckoned Dacampagna to her.

"Guido," said she, in a strange voice, shrill with asthma, "this is my birthday present." Her hand disappeared into a secret pocket and drew forth a package of letters. "Read these," said she; "you will sleep the better."

He took them to the light, unfolded them, smoothed out their creases. The leaves rustled ominously. The Princess's asthma was very strident. From the room's far side, where Antonia was reading, came a faint, tremulous sigh. Slowly, painstakingly, Guido read on. All at once his glance moved to one side of the letter, and remained fixed, down-staring. His expression was of embarrassment—that of a person who feels that he is called on to appear highly mystified, highly indignant, and hardly knows how to set about it.

"Why," he said, uncertainly, turning toward the Princess, "this is Luigi's writing, and his name is signed!"

"Benissimo!" called Don Luigi, coming eagerly forward. "Those letters are mine; I admit it. I'll thank you for them. They can't possibly interest you, and besides—"

"To whom are they?" asked Guido, distrustfully, putting his fist down like a paper-weight on the scattered sheets.

"To a lady; some one you never knew. No con-

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cern of yours, Guido, though I'll tell you—it's no secret—they are to a woman—" Luigi rambled on—"a woman I once met—"

"To a woman!" snorted the Princess. "I never suspected anything else!" And she hugged her dressing-gown about her in a nervous transport.

Dacampagna's jaws dropped. He looked at sea. "What does this mean, Excellency?"

"Per San Pedro, you're imbecile, Guido!" the Princess shouted.

The Marchesa Dacampagna came to her husband. "Guido," she said, in a minor key, "her Excellency wishes you to understand that those letters, or so she thinks, were written to me."

Guido gave an inarticulate cry and sprang to his feet. His chair fell backward. "Per Dio, Antonia, if I—" He raised his hand threateningly.

His brother caught his wrist. "Be careful!" warned Luigi.

As an outraged husband Dacampagna was a failure. His coat-tails were crumpled; he was short of breath, and—that was all.

Luigi released his brother's arm, went to the fire, turned his back to it, warmed the sole of each shoe alternately, sucked a toothpick after the pleasing Continental fashion, and smiled very sweetly.

"Isn't it too bad!" said Guido, forlornly, turning to the Princess. "Here I have been feeding and dressing these two—some one find a name for me to call them. Oh, God!" he cried, in a sudden burst of fury, "these two have been eating up all my money! Look at this man. He's lived on me, actually lived on me. He owes me the very shoes on

his feet. Why, he'd be starving in the streets if it weren't for me. See that woman over there—she's a bloodsucker, a leech. For God's sake, Antonia, speak! What have you got to say!"

"Nothing—" indifferently, as though the word were hardly worth the speaking.

"Nothing, Marchesa?" Luigi interposed. "Surely you won't let such an accusation pass. Letters you never even saw—why, it's folly, madness! Swear on your conscience, swear by all the saints!"

"I shall not raise my hand to justify myself." And she stood looking at Luigi as though in his eyes she marked a new expression.

"Raise your hands, indeed!" grunted the Princess, who wanted to be noticed. "Raise your hands, or raise your feet. You'll have to raise *yourself* before you are clear of this. Do not go, Lord Trevers," she added, turning to Richard, who, at the first sight of an Italian squabble, had tried to dodge past her and get through the door. "A scandal has been going on in my house, and I have seemed to shelter it. I ask you, Lord Trevers, to witness my horror, my disgust—"

"Pardon me, Princess," said Dick, looking very uncomfortable, "but this is no business of mine, and if you will let me pass—"

The Princess ended the discussion by planting herself in the doorway, a hand on each side, her camphor-scented dressing-gown blocking all egress.

"Guido," said she, "your wife kept those letters in a japanned box, in the lower drawer of the wardrobe, in her bedroom. I was looking there one day—I forget for what—and I found them. She is so

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careless, the box wasn't even locked. She wears the key on a chain around her neck with her cross and her scapular. She wears it on her heart, Guido, with her scapular and the cross of God."

"Antonia!" her husband cried, "where's your blue blood and your fine ancestors you've talked and talked to me about? They didn't keep you straight. Look here, all you people—you Excellency, you Trevers, you Eugenio—you've seen and you've had your laugh. But wait, for, so help me God! I will be even with her yet. She shall pay; I'll make her suffer as much as a woman can; I'll drag her in the dirt; she sha'n't hold up her head again. As for you—" turning on his brother, with an oath.

Antonia interposed: "I have something here," striking her breast, "and it has been here for years, and it will come out. Guido, do you remember our first year together? How I cried, how homesick I was for what I had been, how unhappy you made me? Why? Because I was your wife? That is no excuse. You had one set of rules for yourself and another for me. Your rules were lax, and mine everything that was hard. You didn't even pretend to love me; then why should I love you? You lied to me; then why shouldn't I lie? You deceived me; then why shouldn't I deceive you? You were selfish, and brutal, and neglectful—why? Because I was a woman. That is no answer. Haven't I my right to happiness?" Her voice rose in a cry. "Happiness, that is what we all work for. Ought I just to have sat down, and given up, and held my breath and died?"

Guido was a bully, and as she blazed and paled with anger he grew servile.

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"I don't understand!" he faltered.

"No, you never have." She spoke monotonously, with a sudden relapse to her inattentive manner.

"There," shouted the Princess, who could not keep still, "there, that is what annoys me so in Antonia—always the *femme incomprise*, always posing as unappreciated. I wonder, Luigi, that you have been able to put up so long with her affectations. To hear her talk one would think she was the only woman who had ever had a drunken cad for a husband. In fact, the only woman who ever had a husband at all."

"I will have your blood, Luigi!" stormed Guido. "You shall fight me for this."

"Marchese," said Luigi, striking an attitude, "I insist on nothing less."

"I shall be your second, Don Luigi," volunteered Eugenio.

"One thing only I regret, Guido," said his brother, "you question the honor of a lady as pure as one of the saints in heaven and as holy as the Madonna."

The Colibri was vexed. "As pure as one of the saints, indeed!" sniffed she, peevishly. "There was a Saint Mary Magdalene, so I have been told."

Like a feeble she-goat on the outskirts of a fray among her kind, and looking on bleating and agitated, thus stood Billford, disregarded.

"Never, never," cried the kind old lady, trying to do her little bit of good, "can I believe anything that is not highly to the credit, highly laudatory of this excellent, this admirable gentlewoman!"

The Princess Colibri gathered her dressing-gown about her, came shuffling to the lamplight and stood

beside the table, looking down on the letters with a sly, evil smile. There they lay, poor crumpled papers, litanies of love! "You are my life, I cannot live without you—I love you so—" stale phrases traced in pale ink, yet written with what rendings of the heart!

"My heart's desire, lodestar of my existence!" read the Princess. "Pretty names, but not original." And she smoothed the leaves with her soft, moist-looking hands.

A trembling passed over Antonia, a shudder. Guido came and gathered up the letters and laid them together—the poor, accusing papers, from age and much reading, were falling to pieces. Antonia held her hands over them as though to protect them. The Princess Colibri drew in her head like that of a snake about to strike—her low, flat skull, her small, evil eyes, her cheeks hanging in paunches, her gray, dead-tinted flesh, suggested the head of an old flabby cobra.

"You common drab!" she hissed, transported by a crazy rage. "I am sick of your airs and your religious cant, and your fine feeling. What are you, anyhow? Nothing but an adulteress, for all your church-goings. What is the good of your saints and your host of angels? For the last four years have they been asleep or looking another way? Isn't it an ugly picture? A woman, faint with the kisses of her husband's brother, goes to praise God, lets her knees grow to the paving-stones, doubles up her obsequious back—'Mea culpa, mea multa culpa!' You hypocrite!"

"Yes, you hypocrite!" Guido burst out. "Why, Excellency, I have seen her—"

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“Hush, Guido, hush!” soothed the Princess, assuming a decorous manner. “We must be fair; we must be just. Antonia has not defended herself. Antonia has not spoken yet. Marchesa, Saint Peter, if you remember, denied his Master and his Lord. He said, ‘I do not know the man.’ Are you braver than the apostle? Your love to you is sacred; I have heard you say so. Come, now, a direct answer—are these letters yours—yes or no?”

It was at this moment that Fortunata, restless and hag-ridden, drew back the portière; her face, against the dark hanging, and above the collar of her black dress, seemed as wistful as that of a child. What she saw arrested her. She stood still, her hand on the door-frame. The Princess Colibri’s back was turned, but if ever a back told of evil tempers, malignant rage, venom, it was her Excellency’s spiteful shoulders. Antonia faced her aunt, her hands crossed on her chest. She looked very grave and pale. Guido sat humped up, a glowering look on his red, sulky face. Across the back of a chair hung a creased ribbon. At sight of it Fortunata realized the meaning of this scene, and what it was that Antonia held so carefully. Reasonless impulse took possession of her. She asked, “Antonia, what are you doing with my letters?”

The Princess turned about with a loud, brutal laugh, and stared at Fortunata offensively. Antonia merely clasped her hands the closer, as though to protect a possession, long lost, refound, and infinitely prized. Guido looked round, his mouth hanging open; and Fortunata’s mother, in a dark corner, working desperately at her socks and drop-

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ping her stitches, held out her knitting-needles, as though to ward off a blow. "Pray, Fortunata," she pleaded, "say they're not yours! It seems they are not nice letters at all."

"May I presume to ask, Lady Trevers," said the Princess, assuming a prodigiously fine manner, "the wherefore of this astonishing comedy? Believe me, the part you affect is worn out, stale. The rôle of self-sacrifice is not in your répertoire; you act it badly, and appear very foolish."

"Don Luigi," said Fortunata, calmly, "perhaps you can convince her Excellency."

"Don Luigi," sneered the Princess, "has neat ankles and can dance the cancan well, or so I am told; but as to being a truthful, an honorable gentleman—"

"He's a liar! He's a scoundrel!" bawled Guido.

Luigi went across to Antonia. "Marchesa, will you let me have the letters?"

Without a word she gave him both her hands.

"You have seen, Princess, and you, Guido," Don Luigi said, not without dignity, "that these letters are in no way compromising when written to a young girl free to marry. They are, as you must have noted, Excellency, and you again, Guido, nothing but the expression of a very deep love I have known for Signorina Rivallo—if I may say so without offence to Lady Trevers—a profound and unanswered affection."

"Who shall ever account for taste?" his voice seemed to say. Resigned, he bowed a head as brown and glossy as a seal's. After a pause, with one of his sad and tender smiles: "These letters are of no

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value to Lady Trevers; they have no literary merit, and so—" He opened his handsome hands over the fire. The papers fluttered down into the flames. Antonia gave a cry of reproach. The pages withered, blackened, fell in ashes. She watched them burn with a pale and crazy face.

"Your admission is spontaneous, Luigi, circumstantial," sneered the Princess. "Your letters are to Fortunata—good, yet I find them in the possession of Antonia. How do you explain that?"

"Yes, how do you explain that?" bellowed Guido.

"Her Excellency is confused, has forgotten. Her Excellency is truth itself," audaciously interposed Fortunata; "she is incapable of an unworthy action, as we all know. Besides, she loves Antonia. There is a mistake, a trifling matter, that is all. Those letters were—"

"In a japanned box," roared Dacampagna, "in Antonia's bureau drawer."

"I have a japanned box," said Lady Trevers, blandly. "I have a lower drawer."

"They think you are a fool, my poor Dacampagna," sighed the Princess.

"I can convince you, Guido!" cried Fortunata. "Question Francesca. She is a truthful child."

"Francesca, where is Francesca? Some one call Francesca!" and around spun Guido, as though on a pivot.

"Will you bring her here, Miss Billford?" asked Fortunata; "or you go, Eugenio?"

"Don't stir, Eugenio!" countermanded the Princess. "Billford, don't move! Sit down, you silly old thing! They are capable of teaching the child

her answer. Go yourself, Guido, and bring Francesca back."

He went, making a great noise with his feet, as always when watched or of importance. Scowling, he passed his wife; flinching, he skirted around his brother. Brutally kicking the portière, he stamped away. They heard him tumbling about in the dark, hitting his shins, striking matches, and swearing. Don Luigi took out a pocket-comb, combed his gallant mustache, curled it up into his eyes, and stared over it at the Princess in a spirited fashion.

"For shame!" cried he. "What harm has the Marchesa done you, Princess? Antonia, the Colibri can't forgive you for being young and beautiful, for being kind and infinitely loved. Come, come away from this house, where you bear ingratitude, suspicion, insult!"

Antonia's looks, her thoughts, were still with the ashes, and all she said was, "Why, Luigi, why burn them?"

"Tee-hee!" tittered the Princess, with a wheezing in her chest; "how fond Antonia seems of Fortunata's letters!"

Guido came plunging back, his red face and burly jaw glowering in the doorway. By the shoulder he thrust in the bewildered Francesca, in pitiful dishevelment. A comb she held in one hand, and in the other the rat or stuffing of her pompadour. The poor child, unused to being so pushed into prominence, gave strange, ingratiating nods and skips.

Fortunata drew her sister to her with a gesture of protection and tenderness.

"Come, carissima, tell her Excellency and An-

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tonia of a certain talk you once overheard between Don Luigi and myself. Show them how long you have kept a secret."

The Colibri, in her arm-chair, sat crumpled up, lost in sinister thoughts, in ugly reveries, looking, for all the world, in her skull-cap and fur dressing-gown, like that baleful king of France, Louis XI.

"Everything?" whispered Francesca, in trepidation, pointing to her aunt with her comb.

"Everything, carissima."

"Why, you see, it was this way," the witness began, in a panicky voice, like some one standing too close to the telephone. "It was three years ago. Yes, I know it was. I'll tell you why, because I left off my boneless waists just before. It was in August. You see, I went into corsets on the twenty-seventh of July, and it was on a Monday—"

"I can't hear a word she says with that piece of hair in her mouth," interrupted the Princess.

"It was on a Monday—at least—no—it was either on a Wednesday or a Sunday, for the chimes were ringing, though, of course, it might have been a feast-day. Mother, don't look at me like that! I know my hair is awful. I can't help it. Now, let me go on. Where was I? Well, anyhow, it was early in the morning. My boots, I remember, were stained with dew. I had on brown boots—"

"Skip that!" snapped the Princess.

"Well, you see, I was standing here"—pointing with the rat—"and the hedge was here—"

"Skip that," said the Princess.

"If I skip everything," demurred Francesca, "I sha'n't have anything to tell about." A wisp of

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hair fell over her face. She seemed veiled and unintelligent.

"There, dear!" cheered Fortunata, catching up the hair. "Now, then, what happened?"

"Why," pursued the orator, "he said to her, this way, quite sudden, with a bow like this (laying her rat on her chest), 'Fortunata,' said he, 'will you marry me?'"

"And she answered him?"

All turned toward the sound. Antonia it was who had spoken. Great drops of sweat hung on her brow; in one hand she squeezed a dry handkerchief.

"She didn't answer him nothing. I mean, she did not answer him one single thing."

"Guido, be ashamed and ask Antonia to forgive you," said Fortunata.

"Innocence is never long obscured," cried grateful Billford, and clasped her devout hands in the corner.

Dacampagna blustered and fumed and looked uncommonly foolish.

"Why, Fortunata," he stammered, watching the Princess, "he doesn't call you by name. He doesn't mention any name in his slobbering, rubbishy letters."

"My dearest, my darling, my beautiful' are the words he uses, and I think—I hope without conceit—that they apply to me quite as well as to Antonia."

"What does this prove, Guido?" grinned the Princess, over her ermine collar. "One sister is not enough for your ambitious brother, he must have the two."

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Luigi expostulated, though secretly flattered.

Antonia was no longer with the wranglers. She had forgotten the Princess, the envy and unkindness; standing motionless, regretful, she had forgotten the bully and her innocent lover. Her heart said: "I have lived on an illusion and been fed on nothing. See the flimsy, scattered ashes!" Eugenio came to her and gave her his scented handkerchief—the prettiest thing imaginable—and took her by the hand and led her to the door. She went with him patiently, feeling her way as though suddenly struck blind.

"Injured innocence walks very humbly," growled the Princess, nudging Guido. "Dacampagna, be advised: no woman, maligned and justly indignant, looks like that. No, no, jealousy of Fortunata and heartbreak make her so pale. Marchesa," called her Excellency, "a word with you!"

Antonia lifted up her ghastly head. "I am listening."

"You leave my house to-morrow, you and your lover and your husband. No more shadows in my halls at night, no more stealthy footsteps. My palace is not big enough to hold us both."

"Here, or elsewhere, the world to me is the same," said Antonia, looking up. "Give me patience!"

"Invoke the ceiling, Marchesa. Call on the chandelier. God himself knows the tenderness you've wasted, the love you've thrown away, the lost belief, the precious illusion. Titania was enamoured of an ass; Pygmalion, of a stone; there was a lady loved a swine; you have heard the old English song?"

"I have an anchor and a sure refuge. In the dark

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and troubled hour, Heaven is my help," replied Antonia.

"My wife is a good Catholic and a good woman," mumbled Dacampagna, who had had a change of heart. "She will be even with you yet, Princess, for abusing her so." And he kept up an ambushed fire from behind Antonia, near the door. "The Colibri owes me four thousand lire!" he bawled; "and by the Almighty, she shall pay! If not in money, then in board, for I shall sit in the house until she does. She'll treat my poor wife badly, will she? Well, I'll be even with her yet. I'm not afraid of the Colibri; no, nor of any other hag."

"Begone out of my house; all of you! I'm sick of you all—of the sight of your tiresome faces. Get out—begone!" The Princess flapped her angry arms. On her throat the veins bulged out like angleworms. Before that fury Guido shrank into the hall. Luigi held high the portière, and through the doorway paced Antonia with the lost look of a somnambulist. Next, the Contessa scurried away; Francesca in her mother's steps; Miss Billford on Francesca's heels—all three laden with paraphernalia, and urging one another to flight.

"It wasn't fair to interfere in Antonia's affairs," reproved Eugenio, as he passed his sister, and he, too, went out. Only the Colibri and Fortunata remained, and Fortunata's tall husband. Lighting a candle, the Princess looked across the flame at her niece; wavering shadows spread over her Excellency's sly, soft-featured face. Her eyes, semi-closed and shining, recalled the gaze of the compelling Buddha.

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"Surely, Fortunata, I have always been your friend! When have I ever failed you? The older I grow, the more I find that to love no one is the only freedom. Then, at least, one is immune. Ingratitude cannot hurt." There were tears beneath the evil lids, tears of vexation, of wounded trust. The eyes shrank, like those of a serpent; the cheeks twitched. Fortunata was shocked, as at an indecency, and looked down. She wished to be forgiven, yet knew not what to say. The Princess passed into the hall, padding in her bedroom slippers; yet unable to forbear a final prod, she thrust into the room her malevolent head. "I pity you, Lord Trevers. You think to have a wife, and are bound to a monster in a woman's body, a fiend of ingratitude, of vanity, of lying, of dissimulation." Her Excellency's asthma, the crackings in her chest, choked her. She let fall the portière. They heard her shuffling away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was the Feast of San Giovanni and midnight. The bells of the Church of Gesù set up of a sudden a mighty clanging, a summoning to mass. From the basement of the palace—somewhere, and all at once—two voices sang out in pleasant concord “La Bell’ Amica”—Guido and Luigi. They had kissed on both cheeks and made up, and cried, perhaps, and were firm friends again.

“ ‘She gave me a glance, a side glance,
And I burn, I perish like a flame.’ ”

Guido’s bass made a fine second to Luigi’s soaring tenor, and they finished with all manner of trills.

Fortunata seated herself. Her chair had been a monk’s stall. It was carved in devils and obscene monsters. A smile, faint, elusive, flitted across her face. Lord Trevers stood in the embrasure of the window, mute, seeming very broad and big in the narrow Venetian archway. He came forward into the lamplight and looked intently at his wife, with an expression unfamiliar to her—an expression at once critical and sad—as one might study a stranger whose features resembled an unforgotten face, evoked melancholy remembrances.

“Of what are you thinking?” she asked, uneasily.

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He was thinking that this pale, young woman before him recalled a certain girl whom he had once watched dance at a ball, in a very scanty bodice. He was thinking that this pretty, elusive creature did not always speak the truth. Yet all he said was, "Fortunata! how could you deceive me as you did about the Bishop?"

"Ah, Richard!" she burst out in unfeigned despair, "must I always hear about that Bishop?"

"It is no use, I can't fool myself. I've tried and tried, yet always the doubt comes back, over and over again."

She had not heard all he said, but from his expression she saw that he was unhappy. She took fright.

"Richard, you don't think for a moment that those letters are mine?"

"You said they were."

"Why, Dick, you know the story; all Rome knows it. How can you imagine—"

"Then you told a lie?"

"To help my sister, yes."

"You always have a good motive!" he cried, with a bitterness of which she had thought him incapable. "Is your reputation nothing to you? Remember, your name is not your own, but mine."

"Any name I bear," proudly from Fortunata, "can never be the worse."

"What was all that about this common cad and his proposing to you? Do you deny it?"

"I did not understand what you asked me, but I deny nothing, and am ashamed of nothing I have ever done."

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"Did he propose to you?"

"Yes, he asked me to marry him."

"To think of your letting that Jackanapes tell you that he loved you! Oh, Fortunata! When I think of the men that you've danced with and laughed with and looked at with your eyes! What did that Italian ass say to you in those letters?"

"Richard, those letters are not mine, and you know it."

"What am I to think? What am I to believe?"

"What did you ask me?"

"You fooled me once over a little, petty thing. Then why not again?"

Her life long she had been very eloquent, upholding false statements and justifying herself by lies. Now she found that truth has not the convincing voice the moralists would have us believe.

"I wish you could see my heart and read it!" she cried, flinging back her arms. The gesture showed her pretty shoulders. She tilted up her tantalizing chin. "Don't you believe me?" she asked, with a kind of breathless tenderness.

Richard inflated his chest, a Solomon come to judgment. His young face took on a stern, hard look.

"If those letters are not yours, Fortunata, then you have a habit of falsehood, for you claimed them without hesitation, so naturally, so well."

She sat there, looking lost, no longer her brave, supercilious self.

"You are cruel; you are unkind!" she faltered.

He dropped his pompous airs. "Unkind? cruel to you, Fortunata? Ah, my dear," he cried, with a

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sort of despairing tenderness, "no one can ever love you as I do! It's not natural to worship any one as I worship you. I can't cure myself, although I know that you don't love me."

"Richard!" she protested.

"No, no, Fortunata, you don't love me. You never have loved me. It was as I watched Antonia, though I haven't any taste for that foreign, tantrummy kind of affection, that I knew where I stood with you. Trifles came back to me, things that I'd forgotten. I am nothing to her, I thought. It was as though I had had a slap in the face."

Richard was jealous; she should have soothed him and won him again. For once she did not move nor speak. A lassitude, a paralyzing weariness, had come over her. Now when she could have spoken the truth and made him love her forever, she turned away her face from him without a word.

Her averted cheek showed its loveliest curves; her lashes lay in the blue hollows under her eyes. Trevers could not look away from her.

"You are very pretty," he said. "That must be why I love you."

His voice was low, and she had not understood him. She was silent and hung her head. She could not bring herself to admit that she had not heard. He cleared his throat, and when he spoke again his voice was loud, dogmatic.

"I have been taught that right is right and that wrong is wrong. I don't understand playing with the truth. A woman who tells a lie, even to save her sister's honor, is not the woman for me. Good-night," he said, suddenly.

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"Good - night. You are hard and unmagnanimous; but you are not free of me yet. I will make you love me as you have never loved me before."

"It is not in love for you that I am lacking, Fortunata," he answered, very pale.

"In charity, then, Richard. Good-night." And she made him a queer little bow, like a well-mannered child.

Next morning, on her way to the *colazione*, in the hall, Fortunata met Dacampagna, redolent of money, of *barolo*, of ill-humor, calling on the servants to bring down the luggage.

"Ah, here comes the pretty Signora, who claims her love-letters at the last moment, after my poor wife has borne the brunt of the suspicion." And he posted himself at the foot of the stairs with the familiar reddening of the forehead.

Fortunata, angry at sight of him, felt not the faintest fear. "Let me pass!" she said.

"Just a few words, Signora. Christo! I could laugh, though it's a sour joke, to think how four years ago you fooled me. One couldn't kiss the ends of your fingers, and to think that all that time Luigi—"

"Let me pass!"

"Though I always suspected that divine mouth knew how to kiss."

"Guido, get out of my way!"

"Not until I taste what Brother Luigi has so often had."

"Guido!"

Dacampagna heard and started, guiltily.

Antonia was dragging herself down the stairs, as

though broken in pieces, trailing after her the travelling cloak that she lacked the strength to carry.

"Go!" she said, without even looking at her husband, "and get the trunks together. I will be with you soon."

He came forward, offering to take her cloak. She waved him away, unable to tolerate his nearness.

"Go! I have to talk with my sister."

Immediately he was all cock-a-hoop, like a dog that has been whipped.

"As you wish, carissima. Everything shall be ready." Passing Fortunata he muttered an unrepeatable adjective. She turned pale, then red, nauseated with anger.

When he was gone, she said: "Claiming those letters, Antonia, has made every one turn against me. You owe me thanks."

"Thanks? For what? To you, Fortunata?"

"Antonia, why do you look at me like that?"

"You ask in earnest? Because, Fortunata, for four years you have deceived me. You have pretended to love me, and all the time have been plotting to take away from me that which is dearest to me in the world. Oh, that I should have believed in that hypocritical face! I saw you false to every one. Why should you make an exception of me? It's your deceit, your loathsome deceit, that sickens me. Last night, when you claimed my letters, I saw how easy it was for you to tell a lie."

"Then this is the way you take a sacrifice?"

"Sacrifice? Had it been a sacrifice you never would have made it."

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"There is some truth in that," said Fortunata, who was essentially broad-minded.

"You bring misfortune, Fortunata. By the saints! You have an evil eye. Think of the men who have loved you—Quesconti, Monte Varchi, de la Tour Bichelle, de Brillac. How have you repaid them?"

"Certainly not as you repay your lovers."

"It's your vanity, your unappeasable vanity, that makes you such a scourge. You must be conquering, taking away from others, destroying. God is just, and in His own time He punishes. Only through your pride can He touch you, and there will He strike." The Marchesa's voice was loud and vibrant. Fortunata understood her.

"Antonia, if you knew what I know, you might believe that I am already suffering under the Divine displeasure."

"Oh, you have done me an irretrievable wrong! You were the cause, you knew, yet you never warned me. Now my eyes are opened—great God, through what suffering! It is ended; or rather—and this is what makes it so sad, so pitiful—nothing has ever been. I shall never see him again, never, and God must give me the strength."

"You call a great deal on God, Antonia. Why not ask Him for a little gratitude?"

"Gratitude to you who have brought me to the dust?"

"You are unjust! I have saved you and reinstated you in what you were in fear of losing."

"Saved me from what? All the world knows I am—I was—Luigi's mistress."

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"Yes, and all the world is so contemptible that as long as Guido seemed to sanction your actions you might do as you chose; nothing mattered. But were Guido blind no longer, you know his nature, he would bluster and threaten; he would shout your story from the housetops. Where would you stand then? You would lose everything!"

"I have lost everything. My world crumbles. By Holy Mary! Fortunata, I can't get over your officiousness. How dare you appropriate my letters! Those letters were written to me, and were for me only! They at least were mine."

Fortunata, who had been intently watching her sister's lips, answered, "You should have told Guido so."

"You may tell him yourself. I do not care."

"Antonia, what I offer is to be kept. I am not a Spanish giver." And she turned away. Be good and you will be happy, she thought. That was said by some one who surely never had the chance to be bad. Here I have done my life's best action, and what unthankfulness, what ingratitude!

Turning the corner, Fortunata came upon her brother, who, in a frock-coat, an elaborate waist-coat, and more heavily scented than the tuberose, was polishing his hat on his sleeve.

"Ah, Fortunata," cried he, taking her hands, "wish me joy! It's the day of my life. The world begins for me."

She did not understand, did not hear him, but smiled on him as he leaned against the balustrade, gesticulating and shaking his hair into his eyes.

"She says she'll go with me. By the Madonna,

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asked me herself! It is to Tivoli we're driving. I shall drive her coach. I am a little unsteady, as you see—been celebrating. If I am run over on the way it's just my luck, for life is very sweet."

She put her hand on his shoulder. "Eugenio, that woman is as silly as she is wicked. She means you no good. If she makes you happy for a minute, the rest of the time you are more wretched than the damned."

"She's fatal to me!" sighed Eugenio, holding on to the stair-rail.

"Come with me to England, my brother. I'll find you a wife, rich and pretty too."

"Northern women don't appeal to me," he said, putting on his hat, as he made a line for the stairs. "The best face in England can't make me forget a certain face in Italy." And he ran down the stairs, repeating poetry, and tumbling over himself.

"He is happy," thought Fortunata, "but *vino rosso* can't console every one."

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM her maid Fortunata had heard of a priest who, through a holy relic, worked miracles, cured the sick, granted prayers. He was a young man, it seems, of the hamlet of Posilippo, close to Rome. His village was transported by his eloquence and prophecies. Hortense, Fortunata's maid, was sceptical with regard to religious matters; yet the man's charity she had heard was boundless. She told of miraculous cures he was believed to have achieved by the help of God. Fortunata listened, and half the night she could not sleep for thinking what joy the casting away of a mortal infirmity must inspire.

The dawn found Fortunata sleepless, feverish, possessed of an audacious hope. A true Italian at heart, she was credulous, superstitious. She meant now to exhibit her faith. The irate Deity must be appeased. He must work in her behalf a miracle to prove His strength, His bounty. Her days would slip back into their pleasant tenor, the horror would vanish, as a ghost before the eyelids of the morning.

She sprang from bed and flung the shutters wide. Parallel with her gaze the sun hung round and red as the yolk of a monster egg. The birds tried their voices in twitters, in matinal calls that inspire the early riser with a sense of journeys, of adventures to be undertaken. She began to dress for riding.

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But with nervous chill and sickly excitement her hands trembled so that they retarded her. She caught up her riding-crop, and, opening the door, stepped down the staircase, guided by the cold marble balustrade. The suits of armor, with eyeless sockets, leaned on their spears like sentinels. In the *sala* Nello was opening the shutters and letting in the salutary sun.

"Nello!"

The old man turned to see Fortunata standing in the doorway like a retarded phantom.

"I'm going to ride. Tell Gaspare to saddle Zuleika."

"Ah, *scusi*, but the Signorina must first eat." He could never teach himself to say Signora.

When the food was brought she scarcely touched it. At the first sound of hoofs in the court she thrust the plate aside impatiently; she sprang down the steps into the court, mounted, and as she evened the reins: "Zuleika is growing old, Gaspare. However useless she gets, she must always be cared for. Tell me, Gaspare, the way to Posilippo."

The man explained, pointing with his brawny arm, the sleeve of his red woollen shirt rolled up above his elbow.

"I remember, I have passed there often." And she set the horse at a rapid trot for the open country. The sun dazzled her; the wind made her cheeks burn. Zuleika and herself were one, as in those morning rides of her girlhood.

Bitterly she realized that she was born for happiness, to draw from daily incidents a secret, a penetrating pleasure. A year ago what a marvel this

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ride would have been to her! It was well after midday when, white with dust, and snarled at by all the dogs of the village, she rode into the open place before the Church of Posilippo. A low, white plaster building, vouted, arched, with a floor of earth and a squat belfry. She gave her horse in charge of an old peasant smoking a cigarette and sunning himself, then went toward the doorway, whence issued a man's voice, protesting, imploring, adjuring. Because of her habit she dared not go in, but leaned against the door, her hands hanging down at her side, her riding-crop hidden in the folds of her skirt.

Stern and wan in a vapor of incense, the priest's face arrested her. He was a pale young man with blazing eyes. He flung his arms wide, his hands shivering over the congregation. He thundered and beat his breast with the fervor of a fanatic. He was hoarse as a raven, the sleeves of his surplice flapped like wings; eloquent, no doubt, he was, though Fortunata did not listen overmuch. The dialect he spoke was hard to follow. The congregation it was that held her. Peasants from neighboring villages in their holiday clothes—the women in gay shawls and head-dresses, the men in multi-colored shirts. As the young priest uttered the sacred names, the saints', the Blessed Virgin's, the children of the soil swayed and bowed and bent down like a field of wheat swept by the wind. There was something inexpressibly touching in these devout, unconscious faces; in the clasped hands, coarse and twisted, and very often dirty, held up in prayer. An immense pity, a boundless love, took hold of Fortunata for

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all humanity. She read in many faces a profound knowledge of sorrow. She thought, You must have suffered, and you, and you, to look and weep so.

At the elevation of the Host, the acolyte lifted his thin little arm and shook the bell. She prayed as she never had prayed before, to the Christ, whom in grief we all invoke, rather than to the far-off and terrible Jehovah. "Incarnate love who took shape among us, Saviour of humanity, Jesus, son of a woman, have mercy on me! Already whispers, faint noises, sounds of the winds in the trees escape me. I have no enemy that I could wish to suffer so. Cut me not off, Redeemer of the world!"

It was over, the tinkling bell ceased, the Spirit had passed, and no miracle had taken place. Fortunata suffered a change of heart. She was shaken with disgust for the dirty, ill-smelling rabble, for their filthy hands, for the very daylight.

The young priest wiped his forehead; his face in repose was common enough; he blew his nose noisily, and from the pulpit down he came holding up his surplice, showing his cobbled boots and plebeian ankles. Fortunata was disillusioned. Turning, she went out, paid the peasant who had tended her horse, and mounted.

"The Padre, the Padre!" and the men, bare-headed, crowded about the church. The women held high their little children to see the Father pass.

Fortunata turned Zuleika toward Rome, gave one swift glance back over her shoulder, and away furiously she galloped. Had one of those peasants looked from his worshipping and caught a glimpse of that pallid face covered by a black veil, he might

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have had food for thought. The torch of faith, that had lately burnt so fiercely, was gone out, and in her night she did not want to believe. To be cured of her deafness she no longer prayed. Indignation against fate alone possessed her.

At the gates of the Palazzo Colibri, late in the night and though the weather was capricious, a hurdy-gurdy played, while men and girls danced in a ring. The Palazzo door was open; the radiance of the hall-lamp spread down the stairs like a silver sheet. A man in riding clothes stood on the highest step.

"Santa Maria!" screamed the dancers, and they scampered in pretended fright, as a horse, dark with sweat and ridden by a woman in a black habit, dashed under the reverberating archway in a volley of hoof-beats.

The horse's sudden halt flung the rider forward.

"Fortunata!"

It was Dick who held her, or she would have fallen. She tried to smile as she shook her foot free of the stirrup.

"Fortunata, what an awful day! For God's sake, where have you been?" And, glad, triumphant, he went with her in his arms up the stairs and into the hall.

Too tired to answer, she laid her cheek on the rough tweed of his coat. She was deathly pale. Her lips were white; her nostrils throbbed as though she had been running; her hair, clotted with dust and damp, lay dark on her forehead; her eyes, between their long lashes, kept the secrets of the night.

"My darling, the rain overtook you! Your coat

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is wet; your hands are cold. I can feel your heart beat."

All at once she opened wide her magical eyes. In each was a tear. She put her arms about his neck; their faces touched; her long habit was swathed around her like the folds of a shroud.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SHE saw that nothing could cure her. She said, "We might as well go home."

The season was over. Balls, dinners, *festas* were no more. They sat at home on either side of the lamp, like old married people. It was pitiful to any one who had known Fortunata to see her sitting, like Griselda, humbly knitting. Richard read the English magazines, the sporting papers, and trashy love stories, for this Hercules delighted in simple, bread-and-butter romances. At the jokes he laughed conscientiously, but he no longer explained them, as of old, and this little incident proved to her how she had fallen in his esteem, his love. She would lay down her work and look across at him with a look inexpressibly wistful and tender.

She was tempted to tell her husband, to ask the help of his common sense, his normal outlook. Then she remembered his impatience of illness, his scorn of infirmity, and her courage failed her. The practice of years in crowded ball-rooms, in chattering crowds, hearing only one word out of a thousand, had taught her to watch the lips of those who spoke to her. She was never off her guard, as afraid of discovery as a criminal. Her face, she feared, was growing to have the strained expression, the anxious cock of the head peculiar to the deaf.

FORTUNATA

Her cleverness was superficial; no serious study had ever held her. Even novels did not appeal. She had been so intent upon making of her own life a romance that the imaginary adventures of imaginary people could not distract her.

Fortunata was growing thinner with each day. Her eyes were startling, so big did they seem in her little pointed face.

"I shall take you for a trip," announced Richard. "Where would you like to go?"

"I'll go where you go," she answered.

"To Venice, then," Dick declared. "Venice is a capital place."

"Where?"

"To Venice. There are mosquitoes there now, to be sure; and I don't know how healthy it is at this season; but ever since I've known you, Fortunata, I've so wanted to go there with you!"

"To Venice, then," said Fortunata, with all the humility of a slave.

He who has not seen Venice in May does not know what enchantment the earth can hold. The spring becomes the Adriatic as autumn becomes Rome. A vaporous somnolence clings to this city of islands, a sort of amorous tranquillity. Here, among the hooded gondolas, among the palaces where love seems to hide, even inexperienced hearts are stirred with the hope of a happiness known and yet full of mystery.

Venice is romantic, chimeric, essentially feminine; no wonder the poets called her "La Bella." The silent course of her canals, the noiseless passing of

FORTUNATA

her gondolas, lend a charm fabulous and melancholy. "Venice is dying," they say. "Venice is deserted!" And yet she must have lacked something in the days of her splendor—the poetry of her decline through the Italian spring.

Venice is for the young and happy. The failures, the disappointed, should never come here. The old hopes will stir, the old thirst for achievement, the old belief in happiness.

Among other scenes and strange faces, far away from the doctor who had told her of her misfortune, Fortunata could almost believe that she had suffered from a dream, a hideous, prolonged, unutterable nightmare! She deceived herself into thinking she heard again. Later, these days of hope were the saddest for her to remember. Supposing, she thought, the doctor was mistaken—doctors are not infallible—and a secret joy crept through her, as torturing as it was sweet. Richard and Fortunata were together now, always. She felt at rest with him, and safe. Yes, and even happy. He was nothing but a big animal. True, but then he was such a pleasant animal to have about. He loved her, and love, she thought, might ward off from her the horror lying in wait.

It was their last night in Venice. "To-morrow," said Fortunata, "we must be back in Rome; to-night we will be happy, very happy, won't we, Richard?" And all day they were insanely gay. It made them laugh to see the pigeons strut; the tourists made their sides ache.

When night came, "Let's hear the singing," said Richard.

FORTUNATA

Fortunata watched his lips, and her heart contracted. "No, let us go where no one can hear a sound," said she.

"All right, the Lagoon then." Under the hood of the gondola they sat side by side. The moon gave to the water an opalescent splendor. Richard talked of their future and made plans. She put her hands in his. A sort of deadly joy took hold of her—something final and ecstatic. The damp air of the canal blew in their faces. Other gondolas passed them like water-serpents, rearing up and bearing on their foreheads jewels of light.

"By George, I'm so sleepy that I'm not even hungry!" said Richard. "After some beer and a fowl and a little cheese, I could sleep like a log."

In their room, an hour later, Dick lay abed, his tousled head and big paws suggesting a lion sleeping. Fortunata was at the window. The air she knew was full of music, twang of guitars and voices and song. Across the Lagoon the ship lights danced like water-sprites crowned with flame. As she watched, a star streamed across the sky like a torch. My God! she thought; why in such a world do you allow pain and separation?

They returned to Rome. One day, early in June, Richard came into the sitting-room where Fortunata was arranging the flowers.

He said to her: "I have been around to the Palazzo this morning. Old What's-Her-Name, the governess, is very ill, the majordomo tells me. I'm very sorry."

FORTUNATA

"The majordomo is ill?"

"No, thingum-bob, the nice old lady, the governess."

"Come, Dick, come with me!" She ran to her room and flung on her things.

"You're a brick, Fortunata! We'll go together." And they went out, side by side. At the palace, however, she dismissed her husband, as the Princess had given word to admit no one. Fortunata proceeded to her Excellency's study, where she found the Colibri hunched up with her back to the door, warming the soles of her feet on a brazier, for the room was damp, although it was midsummer.

"Zia," demanded Fortunata, "is she very seriously—that is, dangerously ill?"

The Princess turned sharply, disclosing a sour face, baggy under the eyes, and green with pallor.

"She's inconveniently ill. The Palazzo is turned into a hospital, a sick-house; and if you ask me, I think she's dying."

"What?"

"Per Dio, Fortunata!" cried the Princess, in a burst of ill temper, "get your mother to lend you her ear-trumpet. I say, Billford is dying."

"But it's so sudden. What's the matter?"

"Pneumonia, or something like that. No one but an Englishwoman could get pneumonia in midsummer; but the wonder to me is the English aren't extinct, such a mania as they have for fresh air and cold baths; no collars on their shameless old necks, taking the air winter and summer."

"Who's looking after her?"

"I had to have Doctor Martini. Pleasant for a

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woman of my age, all these preparatives of death. He said she must have a trained nurse, but there I set my foot down. I'll have no spies in my house creeping about my rooms, eating my food. No, per sacramento! and so I told him."

"No one is looking after her?"

"Antonia goes in now and then." The Princess's sneer showed her teeth. "But the Signora Marchesa likes visiting somebody else's room better. They're all three back again. Santa Madonna! I couldn't get along without the board, and Guido still thinks 'Palazzo Colibri' looks best on his card. He has no more self-respect than a dog with a can at its tail, and the Marchesa and Luigi, Madre di Dio!—turtle doves when they're not tigers, for it's the old story, Fortunata. I am an old woman; all I ask is to die among decent people. I have seen enough crime and filth to serve me a lifetime. The first years your father had his drunken brawls here, and now—"

"I shall stay," said Fortunata, unfastening her cloak.

"You may stay or you may go to the inferno," the Colibri answered, indifferently, and turning her back she relapsed into her former position, staring at the brazier, knitting her brows, her old lips twitching with vexation.

For two days and nights Fortunata watched over her old friend, like those Sisters of Mercy resigned to death and the consoling of others. She became acquainted with patience, with faith, with how a fine old Christian gets through with life.

They buried Billford in the English cemetery, out-

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side of Rome, far from England. On her grave they placed a squat stone cross, elaborately carved, extremely new, jaunty, pert, utterly unsuggestive of Billford. *In pace requiescat* read the emblem of faith.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FORTUNATA was back in her home in the Via Vente Settembre. The sitting-room was unlighted, but instead of ringing for the lamp, she sat down forlornly in the dusk. Dick came in from his study; in his hand was something white; he held it out to her. Even before she touched the paper something told her what it was. Yes, the telltale paper beginning, "I, Fortunata Rivallo—"

Everything gave way in her, and she confessed. "I needed the money; I owed it. I knew the Princess wouldn't give me a lira, although she had plenty of money in the bank; so I signed her name. Yes, I forged."

She waited for him to speak, then went on, feverishly:

"We understood each other; we always combined and worked together. I didn't think she would show me up. By everything sacred, Richard, I have paid her already, but I was fool enough not to get an acknowledgment. She pretended she had torn the paper up. I ought to have known better, but I believed her."

Fortunata's courage gave out; she leaned against the table, silent. In the dark she felt his eyes upon her. Why did he not speak?

"Light the lamp."

FORTUNATA

"What?"

"Light the lamp."

He spoke in an impersonal voice, as to a servant. Humbly, she obeyed. The shade and chimney rattled together under her touch. She tried to read in his eyes, but his face was in shadow, half-averted.

"Your aunt writes me a letter," said he, in a voice she had never heard before. "She tells me you first borrowed money of the Marchese Dacampagna." Fortunata watched his lips, and her heart contracted.

"Yes, but he was so rude, so afraid I wouldn't pay—"

"You told me once that this man was impertinent to you?"

"Yes."

"Yet you could ask him for money? Great God in heaven!"

"Where are you going?" For he had caught up his hat and turned to the door.

"To pay your debt, Fortunata."

"What?"

"To pay our debt."

"But I have paid her, Richard. Before God, I paid her."

"She says not. Which shall I believe? Whose word shall I take?"

"We are both liars, it is true. There is little choice."

"Forgery—did you know that meant prison, Fortunata, and disgrace?"

"I know so little of business."

"Men were hung for forgery fifty years ago."

FORTUNATA

"What if they were?" she cried. "Let's forget about the silly thing. Let's be happy!" She ran across to him, her face transfigured by a flashing softness. She tried to put her arms around his neck. "Be patient with me!" she pleaded. "Richard, love me a little. I need it so much." He disengaged himself from her arms, but not unkindly.

"I am trying to think," he said. "The bank will be closed."

"What?"

He turned on her brusquely. "Don't keep saying, 'What?' but listen; it's a habit you're getting."

She shrank, conscience-stricken. He drew a chair to the table, and sat down, resting his stern young forehead on his hands.

"I don't want to say hard things, things I shall regret. I want to make every allowance. You don't see things as I do; we haven't been taught alike. This life of ours isn't possible, Fortunata. You must see, for you are clever, that we can't go on in this way."

His justice hurt her more than the bitterest upbraidings. She began to weep, her head on her arms.

"I am very unhappy!" she sobbed.

"Why—why weren't you straight with me, Fortunata?" He rose and from the bookcase took a time-table. "A train leaves for Pisa at 8.15—or, no, better, at 7.25. Spalding writes me that the land is being valued. I ought to be there. I shall be in Genoa day after to-morrow, and in England by Wednesday. I want to be alone. I must think."

She understood only that he was going. She flared up.

"You are going to your mother to tell her your troubles. For shame, Richard!—a big, grown-up man like you."

"This is a trouble I shall tell no one. You are right, I am big enough to bear it alone."

"So I am a trouble?" she said, beginning to weep again. "Yes, I am a curse, and a *jettatura*, too. Be advised, Richard, and get a separation, a divorce. There is no happiness for us."

He turned to her with a look which she never forgot.

"If I didn't love you in this imbecile fashion, I should know what to do."

"Take me with you!" she pleaded. "Don't leave me here! I sha'n't be any trouble to you. Dick, don't leave me here!"

"Calm yourself, Fortunata," he said, coldly. "You must not give way to these Italian exaggerations." He glanced at his watch. "I have a dinner at eight. There is just time to tell Melville what to pack. I must write that check for your aunt. I shall be home late and up before six, so I'll say good-bye now."

"Then you won't take me?"

"No."

She dried her eyes, and putting her hands on his shoulders, looked at him.

"I don't want ever to forget you. I want to remember every line in your face."

"It's quarter after seven," he said.

"Good-bye, then, Richard."

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"Good-bye," he answered, awkwardly, and he brushed past her.

Her lips moved, as though to speak, and in the doorway he turned. She shook her head, and he went out.

As he was dressing, "Hang it all!" he thought. "We'll go together." He threw on a dressing-gown and went to the door; then pride surged up. "No, I have no will where she is concerned." He opened the window and looked out. The moon was like a feather, and seemed too frail for the immensity of the sky.

Fortunata the next morning walked into her aunt's study. The Princess and Eugenio were playing at cribbage. The fickle old lady had lately taken her nephew into favor.

"Good-morning, Princess," said Fortunata. "You thought I'd be disagreeable, but I won't. I want my room. I want to stay here. Lord Trevers's lawyer will send you a check. It will serve for my board. Good-morning, Eugenio."

The Princess moved her lips as though speaking, but uttered never a word. Fortunata nodded, smiled, and went out. Her Excellency nudged Eugenio.

"He's left her. Some of her signatures have cropped up. Her flirtations; her lies have made my cheeks burn, tough as they are. She's changed this last year; I hardly know her."

"I wonder if she's happy?"

"Pshaw! my boy, who is? She has melancholia. Her father had it before her, and went about as yellow as a Dutch cheese. There's another trouble

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—she's getting deaf. Oh, I'm sure of it. Haven't you noticed how one has to bawl at her?"

Eugenio was shocked. "It must be hereditary! It might begin with me at any moment!"

"I suspected before, I am sure now," continued the Princess. "I pretended to speak, and she made believe she heard me. She has plenty of courage. I always did like that girl."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE doctor had made a final examination of Fortunata's ears. Afterward he had helped her on with her jacket in silence. She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. He was wiping his eyeglasses, and his face was averted.

"Well?" she asked, and it seemed that her heart must break through her breast.

He turned, and she saw the pity in his eyes. She knew that he was searching for gentle words, trying to deaden the blow.

"I understand," she said. "You needn't tell me." She turned so pale that the doctor feared she might faint.

He bent over her, murmuring consoling platitudes. "More wonderful things have happened, the age of miracles is not past."

She gave him one of her sudden smiles, transforming her worn little face.

"Ah, miracles! They are so rare. I have never met with one." She seemed quite composed, and went out into the street.

"Wonderful!" mused the physician, as he watched her slim young back disappear at the turning, "how quickly youth throws off its burdens"—and he went back to his great work on heredity.

At home a letter was on the table, a letter from

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Richard. It was the handwriting of a boy. He was well, and hoped she was the same. He told her of the crops with the precision of a farmer's almanac. "To-day we had rain"—yet here she was breaking her heart!

She brooded over these letters, expressions of a commonplace mind, read and re-read them. Richard wrote that he would return within a week. The service needed him. That he still loved her, he complained, as though of ill health or of misfortune. He loved her for reasons so transient; she adored him because of nothing, and in spite of everything!

Time was creeping on; the still hours of midnight were approaching. In the quiet room the clock's voice was portentous, and even Fortunata heard the brazen tick-tack. Earlier in the evening Hortense had brought in a large cardboard box containing a new dress. With what anticipation had Fortunata designed this very dress. And now—Slowly, she came to the foot of the bed, crossed her arms upon it and rested her chin on her hands. A deathly nausea crept over her. Her hands, that were clasped together, turned cold as stone, and the utter indifference that all afternoon had so benumbed her heart fell from her as a cloak. The rays of the lamp fell upon her dressing-table; they gleamed upon a group of bottles—bottles of perfume, toilet preparations, all manner of feminine vanities. In particular was she arrested by the sinister glow of a dwarfish flask of thick white glass. Like a fiery opal it burnt. The flame seemed to possess hypnotic power, and reluctantly Fortunata was drawn toward it. With both hands she lifted

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the flask from the table and held it before her at arm's-length. It was chloral ready for use.

This, thought she, is the key that can unlock my prison.

For the first time Death appeared as a possibility. He came unattended by horrors, rather as the natural answer to a puzzling question long and arduously sought after, the solution of the problem in which her poor life had become entangled.

Still holding the flask in her hands, she continued to gaze into the iridescent liquid. It trembled; it shivered, as glows the crystal in which the Sibyl reads the future. Trivial incidents of her childhood came back to her, scenes and phases of her life, forgotten faces, intonations of voices long unheard—they passed, these echoes of impression, with the rapidity of shadows thrown by a magic lantern on a sheet. Again she recalled certain sensations of her earliest years, tremors of reasonless joy now long outgrown. Again she heard the volley of notes, the contending piano practice that had resounded through the bare corridors of the school and mingled with the odor of whitewash. Again she felt the perfume of lilac that heralds the glorious approach of the Italian spring. In this fleeting panorama of life was every heart-beat that had made up her existence, and she found to her infinite surprise that never had she been really happy. Dearest had been the promises of hope, of which many, alas! had never been fulfilled. Her forehead sank into her hands. She had pursued the phantom of success, believing that it possessed the gift of joy, with what perseverance she alone knew. Of what avail now

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were her strivings, her unconquerable hopes, her all-devouring ambition? A month ago she had grasped success; life had held every treasure—what might she not have accomplished with money, position, talent, beauty; above all, with an irresistible charm, so that all she smiled on were forced to love her! Then had come this hideous calamity, and at one blow she was stricken to the ground, torn from everything, and left destitute.

She had been to the wrong school—a school for the weak who hope to get through life without a pang. She had never learned that this poor, crippled flesh is not everything. The spirit is born in anguish, nurtured in tears. Sorrow is the whetstone of the soul, and whether there be a captain or the ranks stand alone, the right kind of soldier does not give up his post.

She started, and her eyes again sought the flask.

For her purpose there was not enough chloral. Her mother, she remembered, had more. She laid aside the flask, rose and went into the hall. There was a ringing in her ears, and she became aware of a far-off piping, like the plaintive trills of a pastoral flute. Through the echoing passages she walked rapidly, with her customary light, firm step, her head held high, with a brave bearing. Her shadow ran on before her with the exaggerated lines of a poster. At her mother's room she knocked. There was no answer. With her hand and knee she pushed open the door. The only light, that of the fire, caressed the sway-backed furniture, subduing the upholsterer's loud pompadour pink. The air held a flavor of perfume, of warmth, of luxury. Under the

tent-like canopy of the bed the Contessa had already retired. She sat propped up by pillows, against whose billowy whiteness was defined her small, cone-shaped head. Her face wore an expression of extreme discomfiture.

"I have come to say good-night to you, mother."

On seeing her daughter standing in the doorway, straight and very pale, the Contessa exclaimed: "Something dreadful has happened! My bracelet, the one of which I was so fond—set in sapphires and pearls—is lost, completely disappeared. We have looked for it everywhere—impossible to find it."

Fortunata gave no answer, but her eyes shone with a strange light, and a pity almost maternal stirred in her. Now that it was too late, now that she tasted the dust, she knew remorse. Her poor mother! Always consuming her heart in nothingness, while her daughter, by right her strength and support, had not given her even a natural affection, merely a haphazard caress when something was to be gained, or a careless kiss bestowed by chance on nose or eyebrow.

"Mother, you should not let these trivial daily things worry you so. Believe me, they are not worth it." The Contessa signalled a feeble reproof.

"You speak very foolishly. It was the last thing your father gave me. Another link with the past is gone."

Fortunata's heart was shot with a sudden, an all-piercing pity. She took the thin hand with its swollen veins and held it a moment lightly against her lips.

"Oh, Mary, Mother of God, have mercy on me!"

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She stood as though arrested, as though a voice, long dead, had called her, as though a forerunner to herself in this world of sorrows had spoken.

With bowed head Fortunata left the room. The strength was all at once gone from her, and she could scarcely drag herself along. Her dark shadow flung out before her, trembled, as in her breast trembled her tormented heart.

On reaching her room she took a drinking-glass of finest workmanship from the mantelpiece, where it had stood for years among her treasured possessions. She placed it on the table near the bed, and into it measured out the chloral. This she did without haste, carefully, deliberately.

She was overwhelmed with weariness, as though all her life long she had never rested. Above all, she was disheartened, like a traveller who has run miles to see a great procession and comes too late, when the pageant has already passed. Slowly she went to the window, dragging her feet as stumble the mortally wounded. She leaned against the frame, and her gaze strayed out into the blackness, into the depths of the night.

It was a divine night, with no moon but a legion of stars—constellations, planets burning in space. They appeared like an army: orderly, majestic, like the works of a wise Providence. On such a night one might convert an atheist. The garden, warmed all day by the June sun, sent up a penetrating odor of box, while faintly, very faintly, from the Church of Gesù, across the way, came the ringing of bells. All at once the moon rose, glorious, full, resplendent. The golden globe mounted with dignity, as

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though intent on reaching the topmost heaven; below, the transfigured garden lay flooded in light, the cypresses cast black shadows, and the birds awakened. Through the night drifted a fragrance too faint to be named, stirring the senses like a caress. Suddenly Fortunata's thirst for life sprang up, the unquenchable thirst of her childhood for everything fleeting and lovely. There stirred in her a tremor of anticipated joy, one of those promises which the heart cannot resign. Great burning tears rose in her eyes; the garden grew blurred, and the close-cropped cypresses, with their black shadows, seemed awry.

Slowly she turned away and began to undress. She folded her clothes as she had been taught when a child. Her new dress, in which she had pictured herself, she hung in the wardrobe with care, as though intending to wear it on the morrow. She arranged her books, papers, and ornaments. These futile duties, gone through with night after night for a lifetime, soothed her as might some ceremony oft repeated, grown monotonous and dear. She lingered over these details a little, yet not too long, for fear lest cowardice should enter into her heart. When ready for bed she brushed her long hair, and so strong is habit that to-night, as always, she looked into the mirror. She felt as though beholding the face of a stranger—a pale child, seemingly not more than sixteen or seventeen, whose fair hair, parted and falling on her shoulders, contrasted with her dark, wistful eyes. These eyes, she thought, will never look again into a human face with the spark of recognition, and she was moved to a pro-

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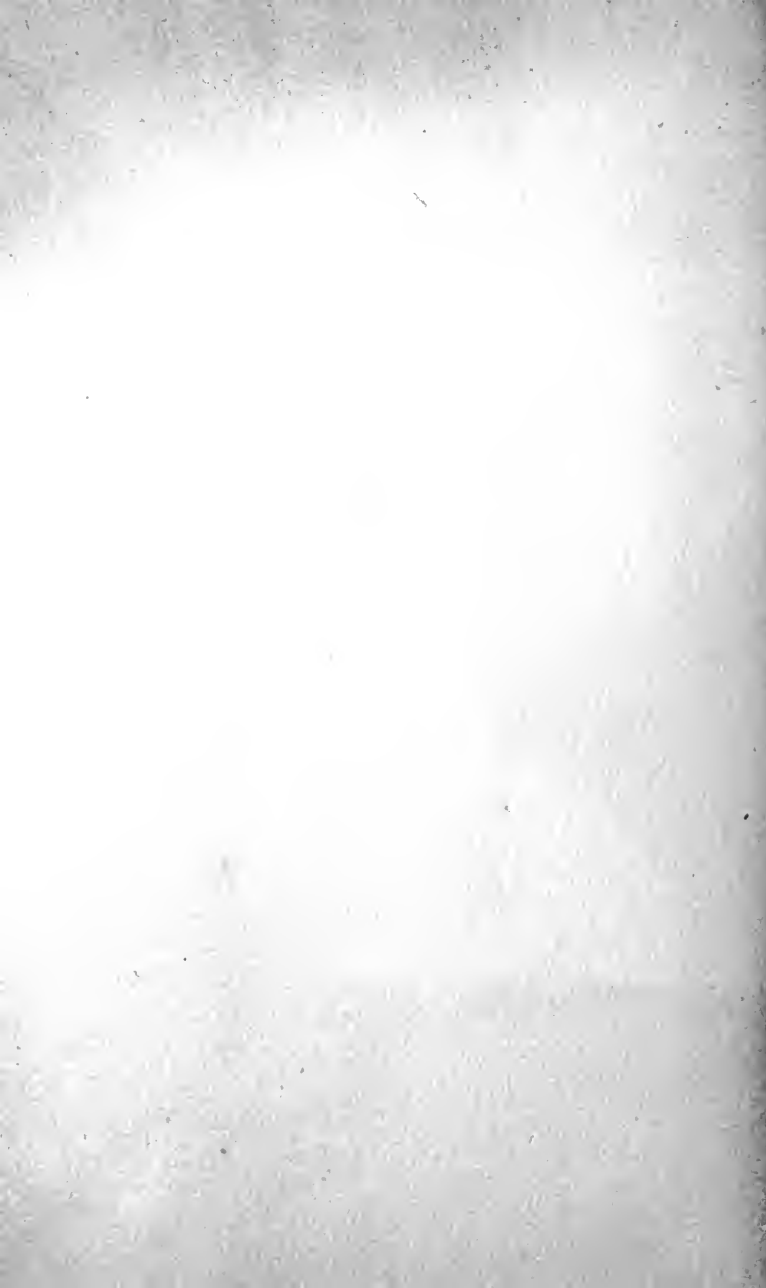
found pity, not so much for herself as for this youthful phantom. Long and searchingly she gazed at her reflection. She understood now why when she had lied she had been so readily believed. Singular that her egoism and lack of charity had left no imprint!

Her courage was failing, and she lay down on the bed. It was the bed of her girlhood, to which, night after night, she had gone so gladly from balls and dances, with the last waltz ringing in her ears.

The glass beside her with its fatal drug seemed to say, "There is no escape!" She raised it, and as the cold brim touched her lips, a shudder passed through her. Slowly she drank and put the glass down empty. Still her fingers lingered about it. It had been given to her years before by a man who had loved her. He had said, "Whenever you drink from this, remember me." This is the last thing I shall ever touch, she thought.

A gust of air, fragrant from the garden, swung one of the windows closed, and the candle flame, as though blown already by the breath of coming Death, went out. To these walls now no longer seen, yet well imagined, to everything that she had loved, to those eyes that had once looked tenderly upon her, Fortunata flung wide her arms and cried, "Addio!"

THE END



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